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"KIDS OF THE BLACK HOLE": YOUTH CULTURE IN POSTSUBURBIA

by

G. DEWAR MACLEOD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1998

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Abstract

"KIDS OF THE BLACK HOLE": YOUTH CULTURE IN POSTSUBURBIA

by

DEWAR MACLEOD

Adviser: Professor David Nasaw

This dissertation is a history of youth culture in postsuburban Southern California. Beginning in the 1960s, suburban areas of Southern California (and the rest of the country) began to undergo changes that would lead, in the 1980s, to the characterization of many such areas as a new social formation -- exurbia, edge cities, or postsuburbia. The areas outlying Los Angeles were no longer simply bedroom communities servicing the center city, but full scale, contained regions. These new types of regions contained industry (increasingly information-technology oriented), office parks, services, and shopping centers, as well as housing tracts. At the same time this new social formation was developing, the lives of young people were changing dramatically in the aftermath of the sixties and the aging of the baby boomers. Adolescents coming of age in the 1970s faced a new set of social, political and economic expectations and opportunities.

"'Kids of the Black Hole'" examines these transformations in American society by exploring a development that seemed at the time to be sudden and inexplicable -- the explosion of punk rock in seemingly placid suburbs in Southern California (and later throughout the country). Descended from the British punk rock of the 1970s, a mutant offspring was born in the beachside and valley communities of Los Angeles and Orange Counties in the late '70s and early 1980s. This new American version of punk rock, called hardcore, arose not among the working class and artists and bohemians in the cities (as earlier punk rock had), but among the middle class youth in the exurban areas of Southern California. Hardcore took punk rock's anti-establishment message and made it louder, faster, even more angry, and, often, even more violent.

This dissertation examines the history of hardcore punk rock in Southern California, describing the transformation of punk rock from an urban, working class, avant-garde musical form to a postsuburban, middle class, social phenomenon. Combining the methodologies of social history and cultural studies, I examine punk rock musically and aesthetically as well as within the context of the social environment. My purpose is to treat the cultural phenomenon of postsuburban punk rock not simply in musical, formal or stylistic terms, but in social-historical terms as well.

for

Esther Day

R. John Day

James H. MacLeod

&

in memory of

Barbara MacLeod

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accustomed to, and a collegial and stimulating environment in which to teach and work. My thanks especially to Maryann Pandullo for her friendship, patience, and chocolate. Renee Rubin and the Park Slope Childcare Collective nurtured both my daughter and me through much of this dissertation. Jacobus Schmidt had faith in me every step of the way, and I would not have made it without him.

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Introduction: "Yep, Sid lives all right, and he's now got himself a tan."[1]

Three postwar developments -- suburbia, youth culture and mass culture -- significantly transformed in the decade of the 1970s. Many of those changes have become apparent now, as we approach the end of the century. Urban geographers have described the growth of a new social formation, postsuburbia. Popular critics endlessly comment on the transformation of adolescence and youth culture with the arrival of "Generation X." And scholars have written on the "end of mass culture." This dissertation details a significant moment in the histories of these three related postwar developments. "'Kids of the Black Hole'" examines these transformations in American society by examining a phenomenon that seemed at the time to be sudden and inexplicable -- the explosion of punk rock in seemingly placid suburbs in Southern California (and later throughout the country).

Punk rock developed as a musical form and performance style in the mid 1970s in New York City and became a major social phenomenon in 1976-1977 with the formation of the Sex Pistols and a whole new punk subculture in London. Punk rock attempted to destroy rock'n'roll from within, by reducing it to its most basic formulations. The archetypal punk band, New York's Ramones, played the simplest of rock'n'roll: thumping 4/4 beats, buzzsaw guitars without any leads, with a submerged, melodic pop hook.[2]

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[1] Kickboy Face, *Slash* Vol. 3, No. 4 (1980), 30. The reference is to the recently OD'd Sid Vicious, bass player for England's most notorious punk band the Sex Pistols.

When punk rock first emerged in Southern California, the developing scene self-consciously echoed and mimicked its predecessors in New York and London. Combining the poetics, artiness, showbiz cool, and goofy naughtiness of the New York bands with the theatricality, rebel politics, and anarchic rage of the British punks, a small group of artists, musicians and neer-do-wells began to gather together in Hollywood and call themselves punks in 1977. In the beginning, I will argue, punk in Los Angeles was mostly an aesthetic, a set of artistic creations. Punk rock music in Hollywood developed largely in response to, in dialogue with, the artistic and musical history of rock'n'roll, and, specifically, the international music business centered in Los Angeles. Punk took hold in Hollywood initially as a musical-artistic response to perceived musical-artistic "deadness." Certainly, there were social issues involved as well as punks encountered the world around them, but for most punks, it was about the music and the music scene.

Around 1980, punk scenes blossomed in communities throughout the area surrounding Los Angeles. The new punk, a mutant offspring called "hardcore," transformed the aesthetic, making both the music and the fashion harsher, more severe, less ironic. But it was not only an aesthetic development that occurred with hardcore. In fact, this dissertation argues, the arrival of hardcore punk reflected transformations in both the position of young people in American society and the landscape of Southern California. Hardcore punk developed less out of musical circumstances than social ones.

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[2] See Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (NY: Penguin, 1993), 166-178.

Hardcore's emergence occurred first in the suburban towns of the Valleys and the South Bay area in Los Angeles county and in the coastal and nearby towns of Orange County, California. Hardcore appropriated a musical form -- punk -- which seemed to strip rock 'n' roll down to its rudiments and then stripped it down further. Hardcore was faster and louder even than punk itself, with songs often no more than a minute long. Setting its protest solidly in American suburbia, hardcore removed the urban working class and artistic connotations from punk. While suburbia had always been essential to punk, as the place to leave and destroy, now suburbia was subject to assault from within. Bands such as Black Flag and the Middle Class did not abandon their suburban neighborhoods, they sat at the center of growing music scenes which came to them and which they fostered. Young, mostly white and male, and broadly middle class hardcore punks began to gather at hardcore venues throughout the suburban sprawl for performances by such bands as the

Circle Jerks, the Adolescents, and the Minutemen.

Part of this suburban shift relates to the peculiar geography and demographics of Southern California -- where suburbia was no longer suburbia. Beginning in the 1960s, suburban areas of Southern California (and the rest of the country) began to undergo changes that would lead, by the 1980s, to the characterization of many such areas as a new social formation -- exurbia, edge cities, or postsuburbia. The areas outlying Los Angeles were no longer simply bedroom communities servicing the center city, but full scale, contained regions. In the postwar era alone, Orange County (south of L.A.) went from rural to suburban to postsuburban. These new types of regions contained industry (increasingly information-technology oriented), office parks, services, and shopping centers, as well as housing tracts. For bored teenagers, though, this new type of psychogeography represented the worst combination of suburban exile with post-urban desolation.

At the same time as the new social formation of postsuburbia was developing, the lives of young people were changing dramatically in the aftermath of the sixties and the aging of the baby boomers. Adolescents coming of age in the 1970s faced a new set of social, political and economic expectations and opportunities. Hardcore punk reflected as well the changes in the experiences of young people and the discourse of "youth culture" in the aftermath of the 1960s.

Whereas in the fifties and sixties, young people were often seen as part of a generational cohort -- either in rebellion against or enmeshed in the "mass culture" of American society -- by the mid-1970s young people saw themselves only as individuals, without any larger group or society to which to attach themselves. Hardcore punk reflected this individualism, creating a complex and contradictory political stance. Hardcore punks did not go to the city to enact their alienation in the traditional manner of bohemians, avant-gardists, and even earlier punk rockers. They stayed home, reviling yet -- importantly -- attempting to transform their postsuburban environment in the process. Punks tried to affect their environment by fashioning a violent, individualist, anti-political politics of refusal.

The ideologies of youth culture and mass culture failed to unify young people in the 1970s and '80s, nor did the institutions of family, school, work, and consumption. Hardcore punks cohered, instead, around their "scenes" as localized manifestations of what Lawrence Grossberg calls "affective alliances."[3] That is, they came together over a shared feeling produced by a particular musical form. At the same time, however, the scenes were sites for contestation over values, aesthetics and politics. Hardcore punks in Southern California, in general, eschewed any attempt to expand their scenes into a universalizing "movement," focusing, instead, on continually contesting the sets of distinctions and boundaries both within the scenes and between the scenes and the outside world.

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[3] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

In establishing and fighting over their scenes, hardcore punks reflected, rejected and replicated the dominant values of postsuburbia. Through the prism of the contestation over and within scenes, "Kids of the Black Hole" examines the experiences and expectations of young people in the 1970s. Further, by exploring the margins of society -- a minor subculture -- the dissertation sheds light on social, economic and political transformations in the United States with the emergence of postsuburbia.

Chapter One: "Teen Babes in Monsanto": Youth Culture, Mass Culture and Postsuburbia

Recently, social critics and the popular media have rediscovered the phenomenon of youth. In the 1990s, debates have raged over the fate of "Generation X," young people coming of age in the late twentieth-century, in a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-oil crisis, postmodern America. Commentators have been at a loss as to how to characterize this "generation," a generation with seemingly no soul, no goals, no ideals, no politics. Youth is once again a "problem" in American society, but one that the accepted categories fail to explain.

The inability of critics to comprehend young people in the 1990s derives from a lack of historical perspective. By the early 1970s, the experiences and ideologies of youth in the sixties had become the accepted standard for understanding adolescence and the social phenomena of youth and youth culture. When observers started to notice something they labelled "Generation x" early in this decade, they treated this new phenomenon as if it had arrived suddenly, as if it is only a generational phenomenon, related to the coming of age of the baby-boomers' children. This is certainly part of it. But there is a larger historical transformation at work, one that began in the 1970s.

Scholars identifying the social, structural, economic, political and cultural influences on today's youth generally do so with little attention to the historical development of both of these influences and the experiences of young people today. Usually, they jump from the sixties to the nineties to show contrast, but the gap in years makes comprehension impossible. The 1970s were key years in the transformation of youth in the U.S., and punk rock highlights those changes.[2]

This chapter will explore the simultaneous rise of the ideas of "youth culture" and "mass culture," and their subsequent decline in the 1970s. I will treat "youth" as a category of ideology, not necessarily a false one, but one rooted in cultural assumptions and expectations broader than simply the experiences of young people. That is, I define "youth" as a category, an idea, flexible and historically in flux. Similarly, mass culture -- "culture mass-produced by industrial techniques" -- can be seen as much an ideological category as economic or social.[2]

---

[2] James E. Cote and Anton L. Allahar, in *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), pay little attention to the historical roots of contemporary problems for youth. Even more glaring is Mike A. Males account in *Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1996) which depicts the "war on adolescents" as simply an uneven generational conflict between boomers and x'ers. Geoffrey T. Holtz, in *Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind "Generation X"* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), makes a similar, though more muted, critique of baby boomers. Typical of historical treatments is Grace Palladino's recent *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic, 1996), which jumps from the end of the 1960s to a brief concluding chapter on adolescents in the 1990s.

I will argue, also, that the rise and fall of suburbia and the suburban ideal parallels the intertwined fates of youth culture and mass culture. By the 1970s, all three phenomena were fragmenting in ways that transformed the lives of young people. Finally, I will focus in on the experiences of young people in Southern California in the 1970s as a harbinger of a larger national historical development.

youth and mass culture

Since at least the late nineteenth century, youth in the United States has been intimately associated with the idea of mass culture. Adolescence as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood emerged in conjunction with the arrival of industrial capitalism -- a process that has been particularly inflected in the U.S. by questions of ethnicity and class.[3] Because the waves of immigration from Europe throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries coincided with the spread of industrial capitalism and a newly consumerized culture, the process of assimilation or "Americanization" has traditionally been the province of youth. As early as the 1830s, the Bowery Boys and Gals fostered a working-class youth culture based upon style, leisure time, and consumerism.[4] By the late 19th century, youth were leading the way towards the adoption of the culture of consumption and style. As immigrants or the children of immigrants, teenagers and young adults were interested in fitting in to the society around them; that society was increasingly defined by an urban and urbane sensibility of style and consumerism. For the "children of the city," according to David Nasaw, "It was not simply their spending money but their attitude toward entertainment that would actuate the final stage in the transformation of American culture from the production orientation and work ethic of a Benjamin Franklin to the consumption ethos of *Playboy* magazine."[5]

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[2] James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, "Introduction: Six Artistic Cultures," in Naremore and Brantlinger, eds., *Modernity and Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 2.

[3] Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

Young people's experiences differed from those of their parents because of their relationships to the emerging culture industries of the time, such as vaudeville, touring theater groups, and, later, movie theaters. Even as these teenagers and young adults worked to help support the family and had little leisure time or disposable income, their urban environment allowed exposure to a world vastly different from the rural, isolated, traditional, home-centered, old world. Even young children, as Nasaw has shown, often spent the bulk of their time outside of the family dwelling, on the streets in a barely supervised urban environment, experiencing a world at odds with the one their parents had known as children, and even maybe the one their parents inhabited at that very moment. Importantly, this was not simply a case of immigrant children entering into a different world than their parents'. The world they came to was itself changing dramatically at that time, and the immigrants were essential to shaping it. "Loosening the ties between leisure, mutual aid, and male culture," Kathy Peiss writes, "commercialized recreation fostered a youth-oriented, mixed-sex world of pleasure." Peiss describes the contribution of young working women to this culture, and the contribution of this culture to young working women's identities:

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[4] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 91-95.

[5] David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work & At Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 196.

> Many young women, particularly the daughters of immigrants, came to identify 'cheap amusements' as the embodiment of American urban culture, particularly its individualism, ideology of consumption, and affirmation of dating and courtship outside of parental control.[6]

As immigrants arrived from Europe by the millions, commercialized public amusements were being developed by (often immigrant) entrepreneurs, and an industrial working class began to identify itself, at least in part, in terms of its participation in a culture of consumption. The process of Americanization, then, often involved the mixing of old-world traditions, new-world experiences, and mass culture dreams. Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen tell the wonderful story of Anna Kuthan, for whom the process of Americanization began when, as a child factory worker in Czechoslovakia and, later, a servant in Vienna, she saw the colorful labels of American-made goods -- the images providing the basis for her dreams of moving to the United States. Americanization was, of course, not limited to young people, but they were most open to the "channeling of desire" by the culture industries, and the process led to conflicts between generations, as old-world traditions clashed with mass culture visions.[7]

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[6] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 6, 10.

Scholars have debated whether the spread of mass culture was led by the working class or the middle class. Peiss, in particular, emphasizes the contributions of young working women to the new mass culture. But the whole notion of mass culture makes such categories and boundaries unstable. Class categories and consciousness became increasingly bound up with identities formed through leisure. As David Nasaw argues, the "ambiguities over social boundaries were exacerbated by the movement of immigrant children into clerical and sales positions, upsetting what had been for most of the nineteenth century a fairly straightforward labor market segregation of 'natives' in white collars and immigrants and ethnics in blue collars."[8]

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[7] Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992; 2nd ed.), 24-28.

Perhaps a better way to look at the issue is to see mass culture as the way that members of the working class transformed themselves into middle class Americans, whether in objective terms through increased income, white collar work, and the purchase of mass produced consumer goods, or subjectively through identifying themselves as middle class members based upon their participation in a national consumer culture. The history of film is instructive in this regard. Early in the century, silent films in nickelodeons in immigrant neighborhoods served as ways of uniting audiences across generations, hailing them as immigrants and providing blueprints for city life in the new world. By the 1920s, films aimed at a "middle class" audience, displaying consumerist fantasies in the new picture palaces. The old audience members were not simply abandoned, however; they were addressed differently, treated as different subjects. Elizabeth Ewen argues that the daughters of immigrants made the transition, while the mothers did not. Daughters continued to watch the new movies, but now with friends and boyfriends, rather than with parents, and now with the intent of following the fantasies of films and patterning fashion and behavior after the stars. Film was, thus, an important instrument for transforming immigrant youth into middle class Americans.[9] Both the increased purchasing power and the changing identity of these youth allowed them to identify themselves as part of the middle class.

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[8] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 44. Stuart Blumin, in his study of the rise of the middle class in 19th century America, draws the line of class distinction between working and middle class by the collar -- blue for working, white for middle, manual vs. intellectual labor. Blumin's argument barely holds up for the nineteenth century, but falls apart in the twentieth. See Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Because they were the first to embrace the changes, young people could be seen as both progressive and corrosive forces in society. Much of the debate over youth concerned this very question. Already in the teens, Randolph Bourne was complaining about the standardizing effects of mass culture while at the same time announcing youth as a potentially revolutionary force. Bourne argued that mass culture, film in particular, threatened to destroy all folk culture, that is, all the immigrant cultures across the country. At the same time, Bourne argued that youth could and should be the leading force for social change in America.[10]

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[9] Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire*, 53-75. See also Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

By the 1920s the link between youth and mass culture was firmly established in the "flapper decade." Through style, youth led a revolt against traditional mores and values. Again, the question as to whether this was a progressive or corrosive development was an open one. The youth revolt epitomized by the flapper, spreading across the country through the culture industries, particularly film, magazines, radio, and the burgeoning recording industry, broke down patriarchal barriers especially, allowing young women greater freedom in the public sphere. In her study of college students of the twenties, Paula Fass describes how middle class youth increasingly associated with peers at school, fostering the development of a youth culture which may have been rebellious but which also attached and accommodated youth to the larger developments in society. Youth culture fads, she writes,

> bound the young to the realities of the society -- epitomizing the rapid pace of change, making

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[10] For Bourne on the standardization of American culture, see "Transnational America" in *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915-1919* ed., Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). For his hope that youth would become a progressive force in American society, see his essays opposing U.S. involvement in World War I: "Below the Battle," "A War Diary," and "Twilight of Idols," in *Untimely Papers* ed., James Oppenheim (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1919). See also *Youth and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

> constant adjustment necessary, and symbolizing the new ethic of consumption. Fads were one effective way in which the needs of the young were being channeled into the historical conditions of a changing society.[11]

Both the elite college students profiled by Fass and the office and factory workers of middle America described in the Lynn's *Middletown* participated in this youth "revolt".[12] The much-noted generational conflict was, in the words of Joseph Kett, "neither unique to the 1920s nor unusually intense in that decade."[13] What made the conflict seem so unique, intense, and important, however, was its connection to the growth of the culture industries, which were supplanting the home as the center of guidance and identity formation. Through peer-group association at school, in the workplace, and on the streets, youth assimilated themselves -- in ways their parents could not comprehend -- to the new ways of a mass cultured American society.

The depression and war decades submerged the conflicts that arose over mass culture and youth, but did not erase the underlying causes. Even during those decades young people achieved the freedom associated with the marketplace, if not the status of the driving market force. In the postwar era the link between mass culture and youth culture -- both terms which came into use in the years after the Second World War -- was solidified when the moral panic over juvenile delinquency combined with the debate over what Dwight Macdonald called "masscult and midcult."[14] The popular products of the culture industries -- films, comic books, and rock'n'roll records -- threatened both to turn the young against their elders and to debase American culture in general.[15]

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[11] Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 227-228. See also Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931) for the fads of the twenties.

[12] Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929).

[13] Kett, 264.

the zenith of youth culture and mass culture

The conflict over American culture in the 1950s was in many ways nothing new. The nature of American popular culture had bedeviled critics at least since the days of Alexis de Tocqueville's famous visit of 1831-32. Tocqueville concluded that American democracy fostered undistinguished, commercialized, superficial arts that appealed to the passions rather than to taste and were designed for amusement rather than cultivation. In the post World War II era a debate raged among critics and historians over "mass culture" -- that is, a popular culture produced and packaged as entertainment commodities for bland, conformist, middlebrow tastes. The exiled German theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, writing under the dual shadows of the Nazi controlled German media and the Hollywood film industry, came to see popular culture as completely controlled by the "culture industries" and all individuals indelibly influenced by them. While few accepted the full implications of Horkheimer and Adorno's Frankfurt School analysis, many critics agreed that American culture was standardized, manipulated, conservative, consumeristic, and if not totalitarian, at least undemocratic. Critics from across the ideological spectrum weighed in with their opinions, generally agreeing that mass culture was both debased and debasing. They might have disagreed on the source of the problem -- democracy, technology, literacy, capitalism, the capitalist class, the commodity form, or American exceptionalism, etc. -- but, almost universally believed that individuals could not escape mass culture's grasp. Americans were, in Dwight Macdonald's words, "caught up in the inexorable workings of a mechanism...."[16]

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[14] Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 59-73.

[15] See James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture.*

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[16] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (abridged edition, New York: New American Library, 1956), see especially "In What Spirit the Americans Cultivate the Arts," 169-173; Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1989; orig. 1944), 120-167; Macdonald in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass*

The link of the debate over mass culture to the seemingly new phenomenon of youth culture occurred most saliently in the furor over juvenile delinquency. Throughout the 1950s, as Jim Gilbert shows, the problem of juvenile delinquency would be tied to mass culture:

> For many Americans, mass culture ... solved the mystery of delinquency. It was an outside force guided from media centers in New York and Hollywood. It affected all classes of children. It penetrated the home. And it appeared to promote values contrary to those of many parents.[17]

Key to the link was the discovery by the culture industries of the youth market, with the increasing disposable income available to teenagers in a period of expanding affluence. Whether the products of the culture industries, such as the 1955 films *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, reflected or promoted -- or neither -- the problem of juvenile delinquency, they certainly spread the idea of

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Culture, 71; also collected in the Rosenberg and White volume are important articles by Clement Greenberg, Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler, Bernard Rosenberg, David White, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Leo Lowenthal, Gilbert Seldes, David Reisman, Marshall McLuhan, and many others. These arguments mirror the simultaneous critiques of conformist America in the influential David Reisman *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) and C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951). Also very influential for researchers was Leo Lowenthal, "The Triumph of Mass Idols," in *Literature and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Books, 1984), 203-235; orig. in *Radio Research 1942-43*, ed. Paul F. Lazersfeld and Frank N. Stanton, (Duell, Sloan & Pierce, 1944). See also, Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture Revisited* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1971).

[17] Gilbert, 77.

adolescence as a category separate from, and opposed to, adulthood. Gilbert argues that the moral panic resulted from a misunderstanding on the part of adults of large-scale social transformations occurring in the United States:

> If indeed it was partly a symbolic term, delinquency represented a projection of uneasiness, a measure of discomfort that adults felt about the social and cultural changes that touched them too. .... Youth more than adults bore the imprint of these changes. They were the harbingers of a new society, and adults were prepared to punish the messengers so much did they wish to avoid the message that the family was rapidly changing, that affluence was undercutting old mores, that working women were altering the sexual politics of the home and workplace, and that the media were transforming American culture into a homogenized mass that disguised local distinctions and prepared the way for a new sort of social order.[18]

As in the early years of the century, a number of demographic, social and economic changes -- dislocations, population mixtures and entrepreneurial activity -- were occurring to forge a link between youth and the expanding culture industries. While the consumers were supposed to be fairly-recently-born, and newly-arrived-in-the-suburbs, the creators were often other types of migrants, whether second and third generation Jews in Hollywood, or blues, folk, and country musicians, black and white, newly moved from the countryside to the cities of the midwest.[19] And the messages of these mass culture products often did promote the values of consumerism, over and against competing local, ethnic, and patriarchal values.[20] In fact, it was the discovery by the culture industries that, in Gilbert's words, "youth culture was not necessarily something to bemoan; it could be an innovation to be celebrated," which led to the juvenile delinquents' of the 50s transformation into the Pepsi Generation of the 1960s.[21]

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[18] Gilbert, 41.

[19] See Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) and George Lipsitz, "Against the Wind: Dialogic Aspects of Rock and Roll" in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American*

From Beatlemania to Woodstock, youth provided the culture industries with one marketing opportunity after another. At the same time, "youth culture" unified young people, often in opposition to mass culture, most notably in the formation of the New Left. In both the Port Huron Statement and Mario Savio's resounding speeches in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, the nascent New Left appealed to young people as both the products of the age of affluence, and its reformers. As in previous generations, the question as to whether youth could be harnessed to bring

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Popular Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 99-132.

[20] See Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television," and "Why Remember Mama? The Changing Face of a Women's Narrative," in *Time Passages*, 39-98; Mark Crispin Miller, "Prime Time: Deride and Conquer," in Todd Gitlin, ed. *Watching Television* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 183-228); and, Lynn Spigel, "Television in the Family Circle" in *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* ((Chicago: University Press, 1992), 36-72.

[21] Gilbert, 195.

about positive social change was hotly debated, but it seemed to be confirmed in the early years of the decade with the biracial, student-led civil rights movement. And the hippie movement could be seen as the broader manifestation of this takeover and transformation of American culture by youth.

By the end of the decade, the "counterculture" had in some ways become the mass culture. The destinies of mass culture and youth culture were inextricably intertwined. But at the moment of the ascendence of "youth culture," it was over, as the category no longer spoke of a distinct group, and the classification would not survive to describe the next generation of young people coming of age. The category of youth had always been more ideological than real, ignoring differences of race and class especially. But after the 1960s the ideal itself disappeared. No longer could young people identify themselves as part of a larger group called "youth" which would change society.

suburbia and postsuburbia

At the same time as the ideals of youth culture and mass culture were disappearing, another significant change was taking place on the American landscape. If the U.S. Census of 1890 declared the western frontier closed, the census of 1970 declared the closing of another frontier --

the "crabgrass frontier."[22] In 1970 more people lived in suburbs in the U.S. than in cities or in rural areas. 76 million Americans resided in the suburban rings of SMSAs, a plurality of the population (37 percent) while 64 million lived in the central cities.[23] The United States was now a suburban nation, even as the nature of suburbia itself was undergoing alteration. Already by 1970, I will argue, and certainly by 1980, much of suburbia across the country had transformed into a new type of locality and social formation -- postsuburbia.

The suburban dream arose at the same time as the ideologies of youth culture and mass culture. By the mid-nineteenth century, the ideal of the suburb "as a romantic community in harmony with nature," as a place for the middle class to escape from the city without losing contact with its culture, was already well established.[24] At the end of the nineteenth-century and beginning of the twentieth, the electric streetcar transformed suburbia, opening up vast tracts of land in a ring around the central business districts to ever more members of an expanding middle class. With the arrival of the automobile, first used for recreational purposes and then by the nineteen twenties for mass transportation, the "full blossoming of the suburban ideal occurred."[25] From the beginning of the twentieth-century, and certainly by 1920, the suburbs were already the fastest growing part of the American landscape.[26] This suburban expansion continued throughout the first half of the twentieth-century, until the post-World War II period when the massive building of single-family tract homes across the nation resulted in the "suburbanization of the United States."[27] Not coincidentally, this was the same age of affluence in which the ideals of youth culture and mass culture reached their peak.

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[22] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Jackson credits Richard C. Wade with coining the term, ix.

[23] John D. Kasarda, "Urbanization, Community, and the Metropolitan Problem," in David Street, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary Urban Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), 34; Mark Baldassare, "Introduction: Urban Change and Continuity," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *Cities and Urban Living* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 12.

[24] Jackson, 73.

While the reality of suburbia was always somewhat more complex than the popular image of "ticky-tacky houses" on "cookie cutter lots," by the 1970s, the moment of suburbia's seeming ascendence, it had already changed from its traditional status as a homogeneous, residential community on the outer edge of an older urban area. Through a mixture of economic, demographic and political transformations, suburbia was becoming postsuburbia. In Nassau/Suffolk counties on Long Island, the Route 128 corridor outside Boston, Silicon Valley in northern California, the Houston, Texas area, and, especially, the Los Angeles/Orange County region of Southern California, bedroom communities were becoming mixed-use, self-sufficient regions of housing, employment, retailing, and services.[28]

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[25] Peter O. Muller, *Contemporary Suburban America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 25.

[26] Muller, 21.

[27] Jackson, 245.

If the rise of the American city (and the accompanying rise of the intertwined ideals of youth culture and mass culture) can be seen as a particular historical development, tied to the emergence of industrial capitalism in the late 19th century, the emergence of postsuburbia should be seen as part of a larger transformation in the history of capitalism, as the spatial expression of the stage of advanced capitalism, or "postfordism." Put simply, people have moved into the suburbs since the Second World War in part because of the persistence of the ideal of the "bourgeois utopia," but also in part because that was where the jobs were; and the jobs were there not only because of cheap land and government policies promoting freeway building, but because many of the new jobs were in new industries which needed new factories and offices, and in the expanding service and retail sectors which followed residents. In other words, the arrival of the "information economy" -- in which the dominant form of work involves the processing of information by computer -- in the last thirty years encouraged decentralization in every way. The high-tech industries of aerospace, communications, electronics, and computers (all of whose main customer was the federal government in the Cold War era), and new service, information and consulting industries in medical technology, software and energy dominated the economy in the postsuburban age.[29] None of these types of businesses required a centralized, urban location.

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[28] See Kasarda, 27-57; Mark D. Gottdiener, "Social Planning and Metropolitan Growth," in Street, 494-518; Peter G. Rowe, *Making a Middle Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); John M. Findlay, "Stanford Industrial Park: Downtown for Silicon Valley," in *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 117-159.

Further, one of the contexts for the creation of postsuburbia is the general dispersal of capital in what David Harvey and others call the post-Fordist, post-Keynesian economy of advanced capitalism in the shift from Fordist production to flexible accumulation. This shift, which dates from the mid-sixties, took off in the aftermath of the Arab oil embargo of 1973 when the nation-state encountered a "deep fiscal and legitimation crisis," and "corporations found themselves with a lot of unusable excess capacity (chiefly idle plant and equipment) under conditions of intensifying competition."

> This forced them into a period of rationalization, restructuring, and intensification of labour control.... Technological change, automation, the

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[29] Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 61, 77.

> search for new product lines and market niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labour control, mergers, and steps to accelerate the turnover time of capital surged to the fore of corporate strategies for survival....[30]

Flexibility and mobility with respect to labor, markets, and products became the key to corporate success at the very moment when declining transportation costs and expanding satellite communications technologies made the location of the office, factory or sales outlet unimportant to capital. The development of postsuburbia also depended on local factors, especially decisions made by economic and political leaders, but the result for residents and workers, particularly young people, was a newly fragmented, decentralized landscape.

after youth culture and mass culture

While there were still young people and still corporation-produced cultural products, in the age of fragmentation in the 1970s the categories of youth culture and mass culture lost what explanatory value they previously had. The decade opened with a slew of reports and studies on the youth of the sixties, analyzing, celebrating and decrying the counterculture, the New Left, Black Power, Woodstock and so on. But by the end of the decade there was no such category as "American youth." A major part of the explanation for this transformation was that the baby boom -- the group which had in the postwar decade comprised the youth category -- had come of age, more and more of them hitting the "thirtysomething" mark. The baby boomers took their dominance of the consumer economy and its culture with them into adulthood. As Landon Y. Jones puts it in *Great Expectations: America & the Baby Boom Generation,* "In the 1970s, the single fastest-growing age group was 25-34, the family building years beloved by merchandisers for their heavy-spending habits."[31]

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[30] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 145.

Another possible explanation has to do with the fact that, as adults, the baby boomers were themselves living in an "age of prolonged adolescence," and behaving "more like young people."[32] The youth of the 50s had been trained for life in a consumerist, mass culture society, and took that training, as well as their spending power, into adulthood. This does not mean that they never grew up, but that what had defined them as youth -- whether their market position or psychological profile as "adolescent" -- was no longer attributable only to a certain age group. Neil Postman even argues that the corporate controlled media technology of the postwar era has brought about "the disappearance of childhood" altogether.[33] And the whole body of psychological research based upon Erik Erikson's influential theories of adolescence which had arisen in the postwar era had come to the conclusion that the fixation of identity which was supposed to occur in the teen years occurred not at all in a mass culture-driven world. The sociologist Ralph Larkin argues that "adolescence" ended with the arrival of post-scarcity society and monopoly capitalism:

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[31] Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America & the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980), 218.

[32] Kett, 266, 272.

> [A]lmost as theories of adolescence were being formulated, they were being undermined. Most of the writers on adolescence appeared in the 1950s. Yet Gillis (1974), writing in the 1970s, sees adolescence as ending in the 1950s. Edgar Friedenberg heralded the end of adolescence in 1959. The silent generation of the 1950s with its isolated 'rebel without a cause' signaled the end of the adolescent struggle for an autonomous identity.[34]

The period of life in which young people, making the transition from childhood to adulthood, wrestling with the problems of the formation of what Erik Erickson calls an "ego identity" no longer existed because people were no longer establishing an "autonomous identity," according to Larkin. With no stable, autonomous identity in monopoly capitalism there is no oedipal struggle, and no need for adolescence as the period for working out that conflict. While the explanation may be more complex than Larkin allows, the important fact was that in an increasingly "postmodern" world, there were no stable identities or stable categories. Similarly, in a postmodern world, there was no mass culture. A look at the scholarship on youth and popular culture highlights the changes which took place in the postwar era. In the 1950s scholars had largely studied youth in psycho-social terms, usually in terms of deviance and pathology. Other scholars denounced mass culture for its debasing effects on adolescents' psychological development and on American society in general. In the 1960s the focus in scholarship on adolescents shifted to youth as a social movement or class, shaping the direction of American society, but possibly in more positive ways. In this way, academics and advocates such as Theodore Roszak and Charles Reich could argue that -- despite, or maybe because of the warnings of Herbert Marcuse -- youth could harness mass culture for progressive social change.

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[33] Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte, 1982).

[34] Ralph Larkin, *Suburban Youth in Cultural Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 42. Larkin actually argues that "youth" replaces "adolescence" with post-scarcity society and monopoly capitalism, but he apparently sees youth as no more than an age group, unrelated to any psychological development.

By the mid-1970s, while one trend in scholarship embraced a populist, uncritical acceptance of popular culture (the Popular Culture Association), a more influential group of scholars, the Birmingham school, began focussing on subculture. Implicitly retreating from the idea that youth could harness mass culture, scholars instead examined how youth subcultures had deflected and resisted mass culture hegemony through "ritual" and "style." The Birmingham scholars retained the categories of "youth" and "mass culture," but the categories were fragmenting, breaking down, and their representatives were being examined in closer detail and in action.[35]

The historian Michael Denning dates the "end of mass culture" in the 1980s, but he focusses his analysis on two scholarly essays published in 1979. For Denning, the key texts which tried to transcend the oppositions between populist embracing of "popular culture" and the Frankfurt school derived condemnation of "mass culture" were Fredric Jameson's "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular."[36] Denning summarizes their central arguments as, "mass cultural artifacts are at one and the same time ideological and utopian, and ... popular culture is neither simply a form of social control, nor a form of class expression, but a contested terrain...."[37] Denning argues that these works signal the end of mass culture, or, rather, its triumph: "[T]he fact is that mass culture has won; there is nothing else.... All culture is mass culture under capitalism.... There is now very little cultural production outside the commodity form."[38] Scholars and deviants retreated to subcultures, while advertisers and politicians invented niche marketing.[39] The significance for the lives of young people in the 1970s was that "youth culture" and "mass culture" were no longer available as models, either to embrace or oppose.

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[35] See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

[36] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979), 130-148; and Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 227-239. I would add to Denning's two choices another 1979 text, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979, a book enormously influential in the history of cultural studies, the first to receive wide readership in American academic circles which put into practice at length and in detail the theories developed by Birmingham scholars.

Another way of describing what Denning is saying is to employ the term "postmodernism," a term which can be defined in many ways. If one defines postmodernism as the complete and final reification of the commodity form, the replacement of reality with the simulacrum, and the absence of an original, then the triumph of mass culture and the consumerist vision in the postwar era fulfills this definition. If one sees postmodernism as the resistance to grand narratives and the end of enlightenment rationality, then the superannuation of the categories of "youth" and "mass culture" fit the bill, as both are universalizing and totalizing terms. And if one sees postmodernism simply as the "cultural logic of late capitalism," the moment of late capitalism has certainly arrived by the 1970s, with the shift to a post-Fordist, post-Keynesian regime of flexible accumulation.[40]

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[37] Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," in Naremore and Brantlinger, eds., *Modernity and Mass Culture*, 253.

[38] Denning, 257-258.

[39] Stuart Ewen notes the same trend in the history of public relations: "Beginning in the late sixties and intensifying from the seventies onward, public opinions and behaviors began to be demographically factored into discrete analytical units, an instrumental array of 'lifestyles' and 'subcultures' to be studied and, once studied, predictably governed." *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic, 1996), 405

If postmodernism is too vague, or too all encompassing, or too difficult to date with any precision, then we can explain the demise of the categories of youth culture and mass culture in the 1970s in more specific economic and political terms. An important factor was the declining economy, the end of the age of abundance upon which the link between youth culture and mass culture had been built, symbolized most vividly by the long lines at the gas pumps, and felt through higher prices, growing unemployment, declining industrial productivity, the feminization (and youthification) of poverty, and a host of other economic woes. Politically, the forces of both power and opposition were suspect. The collapse of the social movements of the 1960s, the continuing Vietnam War, the oil crisis and depression of 1973-74, and the Watergate scandal all brought about possibly the greatest distrust in government and in the possibilities for social change in American history. The government, and indeed anyone who tried to claim the allegiance of the public, faced a legitimation crisis. And the end of the hopes for a youthful takeover of the country was signalled most dramatically in 1972 when Americans from the ages of 18 to 21 voted for the first time in a presidential election, and voted, like the rest of the country, overwhelmingly for Richard Nixon.

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[40] These three definitions of postmodernism summarize baldly the positions of Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Frederic Jameson.

youth in the 1970s

The world that young Americans entered as they left their homes for school or work in the morning was a world increasingly defined by declining opportunity, political cynicism, and social stagflation. Any standard indicator pointed to increased difficulty in the process of coming of age in the 1970s as youth unemployment, suicide, homicide and poverty rates were rising steadily. As Americans, their expectations and opportunities reflected what President Carter called the "national malaise."

Recently, the sociologists James A. Cote and Anton L. Allahar have argued in *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century*:

> [T]he paramount problem a young person faces today in many advanced industrial societies is how to formulate a viable and stable identity under uncertain and even hostile circumstances.... [Y]outh are not given the opportunity to act in the social world in ways that are necessary for

> them to develop a sense of identity.... In order to see themselves as meaningful and active agents in the world, young people must be able to project themselves into future where they assume adult roles."[41]

Cote and Allahar's study focusses on the 1990s, but they see the problems of youth as originating in the rise of mass culture in the 1950s, and taking off in the new age of constraints in the 1970s.

One problem was the problem of work. In response to a crisis in youth unemployment, in 1977 Congress passed into law the $1.5 billion Youth Employment and Demonstrations Projects Act, but even so the unemployment rate for teenagers remained in double-digits. Employment itself, however, was not the real problem for most middle class, white youth, as the rate of youth unemployment had not increased significantly over the years. What had changed was the nature of the work for youth, and, even more important, the wages. Over half of American teens between 16 and 19 held part-time jobs during the school year, but these jobs did not provide entrance ways into full-time careers. As the sociologist Paul Osterman argued in 1980, "The central characteristic of youth labor is its marginality, its exclusion from the stable portion of the economy."[42] Most young people were working in retail and service jobs which did not apprentice them to a trade or craft, provided little opportunity for advancement, required little special training, and were largely age-segregated from adults.[43] Young people's wages, relative to adult wages, declined dramatically in the 1970s.[44] Even if young people were working, they were losing earning power, disposable income, and opportunity for advancement. Further, as Larkin noted,

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[41] Cote and Allahar, 82.

[42] Paul Osterman, *Getting Started: The Youth Labor Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1980), 1, 2, 150.

> The increased productivity of the economy, the degradation of white collar labor, and the bureaucratization of work have seriously diminished the possibility of a youth in the 1970s to actualize themselves in a career that provides the intrinsic rewards of craftsmanship and involvement in the total work process.... As they pursue their futures, a new kind of scarcity sets in. It is not the scarcity of material resources, for they are relatively well off. It is the scarcity of being able to fulfill one's life through meaningful work....[45]

While "meaningful work" has been elusive for many at least since the rise of industrial capitalism, the problem was exacerbated for young people -- especially for members of the white, educated, middle class -- in the 1970s by the increasing education supposedly necessary for marginal work.

Even for college students and graduates the problem persisted. Cote and Allahar label the problem as one of

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[43] See Cote and Allahar, 47.

[44] Richard B. Freeman and David A. Wise, eds., *The Youth Labor Market Problem: Its Nature, Causes and Consequences* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1982), 10.

[45] Larkin, quotation inverted, 60, 59.

"underemployment," specifically young people working at jobs for which they were overqualified:

> Between 1968 and 1978, 25 percent of college graduates accepted jobs that were previously held by less educated workers. While the underemployment estimate was about 10 percent in the late 1960s, it rose steadily during the 1970s, doubling by the 1980s to just below 20 percent, where it has held relatively steady."[46]

The root of the problem of underemployment, they argue, was in the socially accepted notion "that more and more education is required of *all* the population for the economy to be viable and for individuals to be fully competent in the modern workplace."[47] Credentialism, the belief that all citizens must be increasingly educated, had kept youth out of the career-track workplace and in school. Credentialism prolonged adolescence at the same time as consumerism undermined it, and young people became distrustful.

Because of the ideology of credentialism, young people in the 1970s were stuck in school, while suspicious of the reasons for being there. School had become no more than a place to be while waiting to grow up. In his study of relatively affluent suburban high schoolers in the mid-1970s, Ralph Larkin argues that for these students, "Education has become a meaningless exercise in necessity."[48] While in the fifties the school provided the locus for both peer-group affiliation and socialization into the moral order of the adult world, by the 1970s the high school, while more liberal and less authoritarian, was still inherently coercive, a site for the students' unpaid labor, and "merely a form of coercive consumption":

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[46] Cote and Allahar, 38.

[47] Cote and Allahar, 37.

[48] Larkin, 59.

> School has changed from a pasture to a corral. No longer is its main function to nurture the young and prepare them for community life. It has become a holding pen for superfluous people who are segregated from significant community participation.[49]

If in the 1950s the school was the center of social life, and the main site of contestation between adults and youth, by the 1970s the school was no longer even a place for rebellion. Rules had been relaxed and the kids just did not care. School was no longer so oppressive or panoptic and adult authorities no longer tried to colonize the private thoughts and behavior of the students, but young people responded with "alienation and estrangement" from all social institutions.[50]

postsuburban southern california

Los Angeles has always seemed different, the "fragmented metropolis," the "suburban metropolis," the "decentralized city," in contradistinction to the traditional eastern city characterized by a definite urban core.[51] In fact, Los Angeles has been "at the forefront of new urbanization trends" since the late nineteenth century, and thus an ideal case study for the emergence of postsuburbia.[52]

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[49] Larkin, 148, 150, 58, 162. See also Gilbert, 19.

[50] Larkin, 152. For a critique of the liberalization of education and its effects on children since the seventies, see Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 105-40.

When the Southern Pacific Railroad provided the region with a direct link to the rest of the country in the 1880s, at the same moment that artesian well technology transformed the scruffy, arid plains and foothills into fertile, irrigated fields, Los Angeles began its spectacular growth. The combined forces of streetcar development and land speculation, particularly in the person of transit- and real estate-baron Henry E. Huntington, led the way to the notorious sprawl of the L.A. metro area in the years around the turn of the century, with the Pacific Electric Railway Company joining "streetcar suburbs" west to east from Santa Monica to San Bernadino and north to south from Pasadena to Balboa.[53]

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[51] Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles 1850-1930* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), Chapter 6.

[52] Edward W. Soja, "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generated Crisis," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 426.

[53] Jackson, 122.

Even before the automobile became the major mode of transportation in the 1920s, Los Angeles had been developed in opposition to the eastern urban model of concentration. Robert Fogelson has shown how "transportation, water, and real estate" created the setting for the extraordinary rate of growth of the city, in terms of both population and size.[54] Because of the widespread availability of land for development, and the leadership of the largely unregulated real estate industry, "thousands of subdividers converted rural acreage into suburban lots from San Fernando to Long Beach, Santa Monica to Sierra Madre."[55] In the first quarter of the century, affluent suburban developments stretched west of downtown into Beverly Hills, Holmby Hills, Westwood, Bel Air, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades; eastward along the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains to Pasadena, San Marino and Arcadia; and southward along the coast in Palos Verdes. Discoveries of oil all over the area in the 1890s and again in the 1920s also provided the basis for scores of working-class suburbs throughout the area, especially in eastern and southern Los Angeles County and northern Orange County.[56]

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[54] Fogelson, Chapter 5. The population of L.A. "quadrupled in the 1880's, doubled in the 1890's, tripled in the 1900's, and doubled in the 1910's and again in the 1920's," 78.

[55] Fogelson, 105.

Thus was born the diversity of land uses and settlement patterns which the word "suburbia" fails to capture. The "black gold suburbs" differed in nearly every way from the middle-class housing developments which were just beginning to spring up in the San Fernando Valley after its annexation by Los Angeles in 1915, and from the upper middle-class suburbs of Beverly Hills, Palos Verdes and Pasadena.[57] What united the settlements more than anything, giving credence to the use of the term "suburbia," was the dominance of the single-family, detached house. Indeed, by 1930 "about 94 percent of all dwellings in Los Angeles were single-family houses, a figure unmatched by any other city."[58]

The widespread availability of cheap land, the location of oil fields and refineries scattered around the region, the largest mass transit system in the world, and the attachment to the ideal of detached house thus provided the basis for the amorphous sprawl of Los Angeles in the first decades of the twentieth century. The sprawl grew in the 1920s when the proponents among civic leaders of a vast system of road building defeated those who wanted to expand the interurban rail system. The Pacific Electric Company declined and then collapsed as local government funded road building and developers bought up and subdivided land along the new and incredibly ambitious system of major north-south and east-west boulevards. By the end of the twenties, argues Fishman, Los Angeles was already a "decentralized city," with industry and shopping facilities spread throughout the area, instead of concentrated in the downtown core, and auto traffic criss-crossing in every direction.[59] In the thirties and forties, the Automobile Club of Southern California presented master-plans for expanding the network of roads, linking the whole area by more than five hundred miles of limited access freeways. Throughout this period, the movie industry, which had begun to relocate to the area in the teens, broadcast the image of the Southern California way of life across the country, encouraging a steady stream of migration to the region. The war had added the aircraft industry to the oil and movie industries as major employers in the area, attracting millions of dollars, jobseekers, home buyers, and commuters.

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[56] Jackson, 178-79. See also, Fred W. Viehe, "Black Gold Suburbs: The Influence of the Extractive Industry on the Suburbanization of Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History*, VIII (November 1981), 3-26.

[57] Viehe; Jackson, 179.

[58] Jackson, 179.

After the Second World War, the area continued to grow in the same way, fostered by the region-wide system of freeways, first proposed by business leaders in 1942, and underwritten by the Interstate Highway Act of 1956. First the San Fernando Valley and then the San Gabriel Valley to the east and the South Bay region and northern Orange County to the south began to sprout huge residential subdivisions on recently rural soil.[60]

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[59] Fishman, 167-72. See also Fogelson, chapter 8, and, especially, Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). An excellent recent summary of the link between transportation policy and political power is: Martin Wachs, "The Evolution of Transportation Policy in Los Angeles," in Scott and Soja, eds., *The City*, 106-159.

Postwar development and suburban growth exacerbated L.A.'s already decentralized nature, with dramatic social consequences, particularly in terms of racial segregation. Kenneth Jackson has argued that "there were two necessary conditions for American residential deconcentration--the suburban ideal and population growth--and two fundamental causes--racial prejudice and cheap housing."[61] Nowhere was this more true than in Los Angeles. The city differed from eastern cities in that most of the ghettoes that developed were in the original bungalow communities of single-family houses of the streetcar era, long since abandoned by both the railway and white residents. But, the Watts rebellion of 1965 signalled that despite the prevalence of the suburban ideal, and the concomitant low-density housing, racial segregation in housing reflected and reinforced inequalities in power.[62]

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[60] Fishman, 179.

[61] Jackson, 287.

In particular, this segregation, and the increasing fragmentation of the landscape resulted not only from the international trends in the postwar information economy, but also from very specific political decisions by local leaders. As Jon Teaford shows in his recent book *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities*, the immediate postwar period was also the time when local government and business interests were already laying the foundations for the "post-suburban pattern" with the proliferation of incorporated municipalities with separate, and often separatist, governmental units.[63] White, middle-class citizens in many of these outer municipalities sought, and discovered, methods for avoiding the burdens of city citizenship (read: taxes), while shifting the costs of social services to the poor and people of color.

"no future": coming of age in postsuburbia

In a study of adolescents in the 1970s, Daniel Offer,

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[62] Edward Soja argues that the Watts rebellion and other urban uprisings of the late-1960s "marked one of the beginnings of the end of the postwar economic boom and the social contract and Fordist/Keynesian state planning that underpinned its propulsiveness," in *The City*, 431. The connection between the local development of postsuburbia and national and international political and economic transformations will be explored later in this chapter.

[63] Jon C. Teaford, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 53, 59, and all of Chapter 3.

Eric Ostrov, and Kenneth I. Howard ask the question, are "normal" teenagers "in the throes of turmoil," or reasonably well adjusted? Using data compiled based upon the "Offer Self-Image Questionnaire for Adolescents," they conclude: "The vast majority function well, enjoy good relationships with their families and friends, and accept the values of the larger society."[64] Leaving aside the problematic assertion that functioning well, getting along, and accepting the dominant values of society constitute normality or adjustment, I want to point out another more important historical point they make. "Normal adolescents" from the 1970s appeared to have lower self-esteem than did the same group in the 1960s:

> Our data indicate that with respect to almost every self-image dimension, teenagers in the 1970s feel worse about themselves than did teenagers in the 1960s. A comparison of their self-reports suggest (sic) that 1960s adolescents were more self-confident, controlled, and more trusting of others than are 1970s adolescents.[65]

Cote and Allahar point to a similar change, although they avoid the loaded psychological language. They argue that by the 1990s "the young are less accepting of their disenfranchised position" and underneath a "superficial harmony" lies "an epidemic of socially produced identity crises in advanced industrial societies."[64] The moment of transition from assent to "dissent," from acceptance to "frustration and alienation" occurred in the late 1970s.[65] Similarly, in a study of Orange County, California in the early 1980s, Mark Baldassare found that "mental health ratings" were poorest for those in the age group of 18-24.[66] More specific, and more pertinent to the story of the youth of postsuburbia, is Ralph Larkin's analysis of the students of "Utopia High School."

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[64] Daniel Offer, Eric Ostrov, and Kenneth I. Howard, *The Adolescent: A Psychological Self-Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116.

[65] Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 102.

Larkin argues that, unlike youth in the 1960s, teenagers in the 1970s saw no social movements to align themselves with. For them, "youth" was not a category they could hang their identity on, nor was "mass culture." All social institutions lacked legitimacy, so they had no way of seeing themselves in society. As sensitive as sixties youth to "the repression of their behavior," they instead saw arbitrariness as the natural order of things: "The contradictions between the possibilities and actualities of the 1960s still exist in exacerbated form, yet there is no social movement to combat or resist their encroachment of the lives of the youth of the 1970s." The result was what Larkin called "the great refusal" and "the refuge of the self." Youth refused to take part in any social action, either within or even against the institutional world, falling back on the "self" as "the refuge of last resort. The self is the one thing that is their own. They have power over their own thoughts and feelings. The self is the last bastion of autonomy...." Teenagers set up the self as the opposite of society, which they saw as "*only* external, factitious, and imposed, ... a set of alien structures." The only thing these students shared was boredom. "Boredom" is, of course, a loaded term, not to be taken at face value, reflecting as it often does, repressed rage.[69]

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[64] Cote and Allahar, 68, xvii.

[65] Cote and Allahar, xv. What they say is actually something quite different; I have reinterpreted their data. In a graph on page 135 depicting data from "the largest and longest continuing study of American higher education," they purport to show the "predominant values" of college students from 1967 to 1984. The graph, titled "Charting the success of the manufacture of consent?" shows a descending line over the period for the predominant value of "developing a meaningful life philosophy" and an ascending line for "being very well off financially." The lines intersect in 1977, the year, then, which would show students having switched from spiritual to materialistic. Cote and Allahar conclude: "This study suggests just how effective the consent-manufacturing mechanisms have been in transforming young people's values so that they are more complementary to dominant interests," 134. While this may be true, it would also contradict their larger point -- for which they show no evidence -- that youth in the 1990s are *less* accepting of the dominant interests' values. My point is that there was a change going on in the mid-to-late-1970s, exactly what is open to interpretation.

[66] Mark Baldassare, *Trouble in Paradise: The Suburban Transformation in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 13-14.

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[69] Otto Fenichel, in *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, (1945), defines boredom as "at least in neurotic exaggeration, ... a state of excitement in which the aim is repressed; anything the person can think about doing is felt as not adequate to release the inner tension. Bored persons are looking for distraction, but usually cannot be distracted because they are fixated to their unconscious aim." 443.

"Boredom," "the great refusal," "the refuge of the self" -- these were the signs of a transformation in the lives of youth in the 1970s. Certainly, teenagers had behaved this way before -- certainly many teens in the fifties had been "young, white and miserable" -- and psychologists had even claimed this was the nature of the pathology of adolescence.[70] What was different in the 1970s was the pervasiveness, the lack of another behavior pattern or identity for teens to adopt -- especially in postsuburbia. These were now fully "postmodern youth," whose alienation resulted, claim Cote and Allahar, from "the impact of modern information technologies spread by global capitalism," as the corporate-controlled media increasingly supplanted the home, family, school and workplace as the sites for socialization.[71] The individualism promoted by these technologies and the transglobal mass media institutions worked to suffuse youth with boredom, as school and other mainstream institutions could no longer compete.

Nowhere was this more true than in postsuburbia, where the information technologies and industries had staked their deepest claim. In postsuburbia, "the symbolic environments of consumption" were most developed, and the postmodern youth, whose identity was in flux, undeveloped, and "protean," could be hailed first and foremost as a consumer -- as the "material child."[72] Alladi Venkatesh argues in discussing Orange County, California, were several huge regional shopping malls opened in the 1970s, that young people were now not simply consumers, but "metaconsumers":

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[70] Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon, 1992).

[71] Cote and Allahar, 22.

> A metaconsumer is not only a consumer of products and symbols but also an active participant in the shopping spectacle. The participating individual is thus both the consumer and the consumed. By the same token, the shopping mall is not merely an economic space where exchanges take place but a symbolic social space for everyone to come alive in. Stretching a bit, we might even say that the shopping environment becomes a metaphor for other aspects of life in Orange County. The shopping-mall spectacle is pervasive; it can be seen in offices, health spas, restaurants, fast-food places, universities, and religious establishments."[73]

Venkatesh's comments on the consumer environment of postsuburbia resonate with Larkin's observation that students at Utopia High see school as no more than "coerced consumption." This condition, Larkin and Cote and Allahar argue, affected youth throughout society, not merely "delinquents" or members of subcultures. All youth -- again, especially in postsuburbia -- were increasingly hailed, identified, and self-identified as isolated, fragmented, individual consumers, but, unlike previous generations, without the comforts of a generational cohort or a unifying (as pied piper or as enemy) mass culture.

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[72] Alladi Venkatesh, "Changing Consumption Patterns," in Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster eds., *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 151. See Cote and Allahar, 83; Robert J. Lifton, "Protean Man," *Partisan Review* 35 (1968), 13-27; Merry White, *The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

[73] Venkatesh, 153.

Larkin, doing his field research in 1975-76, could see no possibility for young people finding anything outside the "refuge of the self," but then punk rock came along, and a considerable minority of young people channelled their "alienation and estrangement" into a punk rock subculture. Ironically, punk rock, originally the music of disaffected bohemians and working-class rebels in cities, was seized by postsuburban youth as an expression of their own "boredom." Punk in postsuburbia did not recreate the youth culture revolts of earlier generations, but reflected instead the fragmentation, isolation, and individualism of the 1970s.

Chapter Two: "Destroy All Music": Punk Rock and the Scholarship of Subculture

Social scientists and other critics who feared the mass culture of the fifties because it seemed to be replacing the family and other traditional venues as the agency of socialization were right. Rock'n'roll, in particular, became the vehicle for young people to simultaneously escape, enter into, and change the world around them. "Rock and roll was central to the white teenage experience of the 1950s," Wini Breines argues.[1] Breines quotes Elinor Lerner to the effect that rock'n'roll provided a place for "alienation, rebellion, and ... affirmation/community."[2] Susan Douglas maintains that for teenage girls in the late fifties and the early sixties popular music "gave voice to all the warring selves inside us struggling, blindly and with a crushing sense of insecurity, to forge something resembling a coherent identity."[3] Rock'n'roll functioned as a key site for the formation of individual identity and the relationships that make community. Even the sixties political rebellion of the New Left was often framed through popular music, first in the folk scene and then, after Dylan went electric at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, through rock music. When Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" reached the top of the charts, Todd Gitlin claims, "a mass movement of the American young was upon us."[4] Rock'n'roll constructed the young people of the United States as a generation, in the fifties as "teenagers" and in the sixties as a "movement."

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[1] Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 151.

[2] Breines, 154.

[3] Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Times Books, 1995), 87.

In the fifties and sixties, mass produced and distributed rock'n'roll often provided young people ways to imagine themselves as individuals within the ideologies of youth culture and mass culture. While rock'n'roll fans could complain that the music industry attempted to water down the product (especially in the early-sixties' years before Beatlemania when Pat Boone and Paul Anka dominated the charts), more often than not the culture corporations delivered the goods, music that young people could call their own. By the early seventies, in the wake of the commercial success of Woodstock, the music business began to fail to distribute music that young people could identify with and identify themselves through. In part this was the result of the collapse of the youth movement, but it also resulted from changes internal to the music industry.

The period from 1970 to 1973 was one of "reconcentration" for the music business. Four companies dominated the industry, Columbia, Warner Brothers, Capitol, and Motown, all but the last major conglomerates. In 1973 David Geffen sold the independent Asylum Records to Warner Brothers for $7 million. At the end of the year eight out of the ten firms with records on Billboard's "Hot 100" were "diversified corporations with major holdings in industries other than recorded music."[5] The majors controlled the market by "buying the contracts of established artists and buying once independent companies" which effectively kept the costs of competing too high for independents.[6] Economies of scale gave the majors an advantage not only in production but in advertising and access to the retail chains. In this environment, there was little room for new music to break into the mass market, and little incentive for the major labels to seek out new music.

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[4] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 197.

By the seventies, the youth culture ideal was fading rapidly as well, even as the centrality of rock'n'roll to young people's self- and communal-identification remained. The identification with rock'n'roll was still potentially available. The record business was big business, not in itself necessarily a problem, but was now not producing music which spoke to youth as their own. In always looking for the next big thing, and in the context of the consolidation of the industry, the business and music had become tame. The three sounds that dominated the seventies -- country/folk rock, progressive rock and disco -- all sounded impersonal to those who sought both personal and communal identification with their music, to those who saw rock as what Simon Frith calls "the magic that can set you free."[7] In Southern California, and throughout the world, only the committed could find music to call their own. People who did not embrace the "peaceful, easy feeling" as the Eagles put it, had to search elsewhere, on the margins of the music business. Still, rock'n'roll, as ideal and as sound, remained potentially available in the seventies as a form of expression, and as a unifying element in configuring young people as a group or a set of groups. Punk rock emerged in the early- and mid-seventies as the solution for a significant minority of youth.

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[5] Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music," in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds., *On Record: Rock, Pop, & The Written Word* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 154.

[6] Peterson and Berger, 154.

Punk rock developed as a musical form and performance style in the mid 1970s in New York City and became a major social phenomenon in 1976-1977 with the forming of the Sex Pistols and a whole new punk subculture in London. Punk rock attempted to return rock'n'roll to its most fundamental formulations. The archetypal punk band, New York's Ramones, played the most basic of rock'n'roll: thumping 4/4 beats, buzzsaw guitars without any leads, with a submerged, melodic pop hook.[8] In the context of the mellow, countrified sounds of the Eagles, and the highly textured, elaborately and expensively produced sounds of disco and progressive rock, the Ramones sounded revolutionary. What the New York bands shared was an urban sensibility, and a rejection of mass culture and youth culture -- either through avant-gardism or a type of subcultural populism: rock and roll, they thought, restored to its roots in the pre-commodity form.

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[7] Simon Frith, "'The magic that can set you free': the ideology of folk and the myth of the rock community," *Popular Music* 1, 159-168.

In 1976, after the Ramones toured England, bands started to sprout throughout London (and then in the northern industrial cities of England): the Sex Pistols, created and managed by Malcolm McLaren, owner of the Sex boutique on Kings Road; the Clash, former pub-rockers turned punks; the Damned, Slaughter and the Dogs, the Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees and more.

There is no simple way to define the punk rock that developed in England. Musically, most punk bands embraced the stripped-down-to-the-basics power chords and thumping 4/4 beat minimalist punk rock of the Ramones. In this way, British punk was, first of all, a return of rock'n'roll to its roots -- not just the roots in the bayous, swamps, and hill country of the U.S. South, but the roots in the basement or garage. Punk rock was three or four guys and gals pounding away on their electrified instruments with a minimum of skill and a maximum of enthusiasm. Punk rock was to be played live, with little technological and professional intervention, not in the studio to be manipulated by technicians. Anyone could do it. "Here's three chords, now form a band," as one punk fanzine put it.

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[8] See Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 166-178.

As a musical form, the return to musical roots was linked by punks to a rejection of the self-importance of the overblown production styles and ideologies of the established sixties' rock stars. Punks rejected the claims of sixties youth of rock as art, and rock as the basis of a youth movement. Punk journalists Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons argued in their 1978 "obituary of rock and roll," "Rock had bartered its purity and vulgarity for raising of consciousness and respectability."[5] Punks subverted the optimistic generational consciousness of both marketers and rockers. As Richard Hell and the Voidoids sang, "I belong to the blank generation/I can take it or leave it each time." The "blank generation" was as yet undefined, as in "fill in the blank." Even more, the "blank generation" was undefinable: blank -- "I don't care" ... "No Feelings" ... "No Values" ... "I Wanna Be Sedated" as the punk song titles put it -- not a generation at all, but an aggregation of individuals saying no to everything.

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[5] Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *"The Boy Looked at Johnny.": The Obituary of Rock and Roll* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987; orig. 1978.), 3.

Politically, punk rock was more complex. In general, it is useful to see punk as the apotheosis of the postwar "revolt through style" that the Birmingham school scholars have studied. Aesthetically, punk combined the musical and clothing styles of postwar Britain, deconstructing and recombining in a postmodern "bricolage" that called attention to the very constructed-ness of society and society's truths. As numerous critics have shown, punk drew ideologically on the Situationalists to build a critique of the social order.[13] Punk attempted "a negation of all social facts," nihilism even, in pursuit of a "detournement" to overturn the accepted meanings of the artifacts of the dominant ideology. But what made British punk political most of all was the that unlike in New York City, in London punk emerged in an explicitly political situation, especially the events designed to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, a celebration which seemed to punks a mockery in a period of decline for both the British Empire and the postwar welfare state.

Punk began as an attempt to restore rock'n'roll to its roots, but quickly began to express a whole set of rejections and contestations. More and more people throughout the world would adopt punk as their own, and shape its sound, style and ideology to their own purposes. In the United States, punk remained a marginal music and a small subculture throughout the 1970s and 80s, but it gave expression to a variety of dissatisfactions that young people felt. When punk arrived in Los Angeles in the late 1970s, there were people ready to embrace it, people to whom this new music spoke, both as a musical form and an expression of their zeitgeist. For those whose eyes and ears were open, waiting for something to happen in a world where nothing was happening, punk rock sounded good. Punk rock offered an alternative, as music, as vision, as culture. From 1977 through the 1980s, punk rock would speak to more and more young people in Southern California, embodying their experiences, giving them identities, and giving them life. They craved, above all, a personal connection to the music, and a music that would express their refusal.

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[13] Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) and Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992). For a critique of the idea that there is a link between punk and the situationalists, see Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High* (Hove, U.K.: CodeX, 1995), 19-30.

the scholarship of punk rock

The scholarship of punk rock has attempted to answer the question, What did punk rock mean? Was it simply a musical phenomenon, best understood within the history of rock'n'roll? Or did it reflect some social developments, and, if so, what? Was punk successful in what it set out to do, and what happened to it? A quick review of the scholarship is important here for a couple of reasons. First, each of the major critics has something important to say about punk; each contributes something that will help explain the experiences of youth in the 1970s. But an understanding of the limitations of the scholarship will also help to explain the major transformations in American society which their analyses only touch on. In particular, each of the scholars I will discuss freezes the moment of punk in its first years and thereby neglects an opportunity to explore larger historical issues.

The first important study of punk rock, and one of the groundbreaking works of cultural studies, was Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Building on the work on British postwar youth cultures pioneered by the Raymond Williams-inspired Birmingham school, and synthesizing numerous strands of post-structuralist theory, Hebdige located British punk in the tradition of youth "revolt through style." Punk was a self-contained, working-class, youth subculture which used style to communicate its message of alienation and discontent. Punk, according to Hebdige, directly reflected the conditions of white, working-class youth in 1970s England as a subculture which expressed "a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives."[11] Punk expressed, through style and noise, the real life situations of working-class kids living on the dole in a declining welfare state and fallen British empire.

Simon Frith added an important corrective to Hebdige's claim that the punk subculture presented "an oblique challenge to hegemony." In *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (1981), Frith rejected the interpretation of punk as a reflection of lived experience:

> The pioneering punk-rockers themselves were a self-conscious, artful lot with a good understanding of both rock tradition and populist cliche; their music no more reflected directly back on conditions in the dole queue than it emerged spontaneously from them. The musical "realism" of punk was an effect of formal conventions, a particular combination of sounds. It was defined through its aural opposition to the "unrealism" of mainstream pop and rock.[12]

Frith argued that punk was responding to music itself, not just life. Punk rock did not arise as a reflection of working-class youth lives. According to Frith, one of the traditions, one of the dialogues, in which the scholar must situate punk was the history of rock'n'roll and its particular tradition of blending art and commerce.

According to Frith, punk opposed mass culture not so much by destroying the record's position as a commodity but by embracing the claim that musicians were not workers but artists -- a high culture position which already had a long tradition in rock'n'roll. What punks added to the equation was the notion that since anyone could do it, everyone could be a star. Punks, Frith argued, drew on "Britain's hippie entrepreneurial spirit" as a model for its opposition between art and commerce. Still, the product remained a commodity.

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[11] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 132.

[12] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 158.

The first punks who gathered in London in 1976, according to Frith, may have maintained the delicate balance between punk as a social intervention and punk as a musical one, but after 1977 these tensions split punk into two factions, the punk populists and the punk vanguard:

> The punk populists remained locked in their original position. They read teenage gestures and heard punk forms as the spontaneous expression of anti-hegemonic youth; the political problem was to develop youth consciousness and prevent its symbols from being commercialized. The punk vanguard became more interested in musical meaning itself, in the stylistic assumptions that bound subcultures together.... They sought to undermine the populist assumptions of transparency and subcultural identity, to mock the idea of a direct line from social experience to musical form, to expose the subjective claims deeply embedded in all rock music.[13]

While the punk populists remained within the dominant rock paradigm of "rock rebellion" -- the very paradigm which was responsible for rock's commercial and ideological success -- the punk vanguard threatened something truly revolutionary, but only in musical terms. In Frith's analysis, the punk vanguard still wanted to rock -- no "art for art's sake" -- but they also wanted to challenge and question the means by which rock'n'roll works within the dominant ideology and the social relations of industrial capitalism. Through irony and stylistic innovations, the questioning of space and time, through "homelessness" and "choice as terror," punk burrowed in on rock'n'roll and the culture at large: "The music itself ... was the moment of cultural analysis; it didn't express something else, some prior reality, but *was* the structure of experience, for musician and audience alike."[14]

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[13] Frith, 160.

In a work of scholarly synthesis, Peter Wicke built on the analyses of Hebdige and Frith, but emphasized Frith's rejection of reflection theory. Wicke focussed on how punk rock interacted with the everyday life of youth:

> Punk rock does not owe its structure to a new social realism but to the cultural activities of its fans -- as background and framework for their gatherings every evening, as live dance music, as compensation for boredom, as an element of confrontation in the cultural context they have developed, as an opportunity to do something once music was no longer linked to particular technical or musical constraints.... [I]t is pure romanticism to explain punk rock as the musical means of expression for the social protest of the unemployed. They did indeed place rock music in a specific cultural context of use, but this context was determined not by their political consciousness but by the structures of the

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[14] Frith, 163.

everyday life they lived.[15]

Punk was neither simply a manufactured commodity nor the pure expression of youthful rebellion; it was first of all a radical transformation in the aesthetics of rock'n'roll. Its significance, according to Wicke, lay in the ways that the sound and style of punk interacted with other social, economic, technological and cultural factors within the context of the *everyday lives* of punk rockers.

Greil Marcus made a similar, but grander, claim about punk's irruption into everyday life. To Marcus, punk made a fissure -- "a precious disruption, ... almost transcendentally odd" -- in the everyday life not only of punks, but of the world. Punk was possibly of world historical importance not because it transformed the record industry, or brought about an organized youth rebellion, but because in a world where nothing seemed to happen, one could see and hear punk and think, "*this is actually happening*":

> The Sex Pistols made a breach in the pop milieu, in the screen of received cultural assumptions governing what one expected to hear and how one expected to respond. Because received cultural assumptions are hegemonic propositions about the way the world is supposed to work--ideological constructs perceived and experienced as natural facts -- the breach in the pop milieu opened into the realm of everyday life: the milieu where, commuting to work, doing one's job in the home or the factory or the office or the mall, going to the movies, buying groceries, buying records, watching television, making love, having

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[15] Peter Wicke, *Rock Music: Culture, aesthetics and sociology* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 147.

> conversations, not having conversations, or making lists of what to do next, people actually lived.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of everyday life, Marcus concluded that punk rock called into question all social facts, everything that everyone could take for granted: "Judged according to its demands on the world, a Sex Pistols record had to change the way a given person performed his or her commute -- which is to say that the record had to connect that act to every other, and then call the enterprise as a whole into question. Thus would the record change the world." Marcus took his analysis beyond Hebdige, Frith, and Wicke by situating punk within "the geopolitics of popular culture," a culture not necessarily tied to one group, or one industry, beyond youth culture and mass culture.[16]

According to Marcus, punk brought new voices, with new demands, into the world, and thus a new source of power, and a new critique of the mundanity of everyday life; thus songs like the Buzzcocks' "Boredom," X-Ray Spex' "Oh Bondage, Up Yours!," and the Sex Pistols' "Pretty Vacant." Marcus analyzed punk's critique of everyday life:

> Shopping, traffic, and advertising as world-historical insults integrated into everyday life as seductions--in a way, punk was most easily recognizable as a new version of the old Frankfurt School critique of mass culture.... But now the premises of the old critique were exploding out of a spot no one in the Frankfurt School, not Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, or Walter Benjamin, had ever

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[16] Marcus, 4, 19, 2-3, 85.

> recognized: mass culture's pop cult heart. Stranger still: the old critique of mass culture now paraded as mass culture, at least as protean, would-be mass culture.... What Adorno's negation lacked was glee--a spirit the punk version of his world never failed to deliver.

What Marcus found most striking and revolutionary about punk rock was that it sat at the center of mass culture, as "a scam, a bid for success through scandal, for 'cash from chaos,' as one of Malcolm McLaren's slogans had it."[17]

Contra Hebdige, punk rock was, for Marcus, no working-class youth subculture opposed to the dominant culture. Echoing Michael Denning's argument about the end of mass culture, Marcus argued that since mass culture was all there was, revolution could only come from within, in the form of the subversion and demystification of hegemonic propositions. But, like Hebdige, Marcus isolated the moment of punk in 1977, freezing punk in history. In the end, for Marcus, "punk was only art"; it may have asked for the world, and for a moment got it, but ultimately it returned to its status as art, swallowed up by the world, unable to sustain its social significance.[18]

While punk seemed to Marcus to reveal "the secret history of the Twentieth Century," its moment was ephemeral, a "situation without a future."[19] Maybe, after all, punk's negation was no more than nihilism. Even punk's effect on pop music history was in doubt, Marcus wrote in 1983, as Michael Jackson -- the embodiment of the dehumanized pop machine triumphant -- reigned in the kingdom of "the heaven of the spectacle."[20]

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[17] Marcus, 70-73, 17-18.

[18] Marcus, 442.

[19] Marcus, 446.

Hebdige and Frith also froze the moment of punk in 1976-77. As mentioned earlier, Frith argued that punk split after 1977 into punk populism and the punk vanguard. After the original punks Hebdige saw only a story of declension. Denying punk any history, he embraced the distinction which subcultures make between "originals and hangers-on."[21] Hebdige thus saw only the destruction of punk, not its transformation, and he blamed the dominant media. Mass media conversion of subcultural signs into "mass-produced objects" and the labelling of subcultural behavior as deviant "by dominant groups" invariably brings about "the simultaneous diffusion and defusion of the subcultural style."[22]

Jon Savage, in his definitive account of the Sex Pistols, takes a similar tone toward the mass media, blaming it for destroying punk. Throughout his book there are references to how the diffusion of punk brings about its defusion, with tale after tale of latecomers invading the scene and destroying its purity. For both Hebdige and Savage the key moment came in December 1976 with the Sex Pistols appearance on the Thames' "Today" show, when they called the host Bill Grundy a "dirty sod" and a "fucking rotter" among other choice invectives.[23] As one Sex Pistol remembered, "Before then, it was just music: the next day, it was the media."[24]

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[20] Marcus, quoting Guy Debord, 98.

[21] Hebdige, 122.

[22] Hebdige, 94, 93. For a deft critique of Hebdige and others, see Gary Clarke, "Defending Ski-Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures," in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds., *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 81-96. A static image of punk is portrayed in Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

The media fury in the wake of the Pistols' scandalous, disrespectful acts of swearing on television unleashed "the repressed hysteria of a nation" and utterly transformed punk rock.[25] Not only did the episode doom the Pistols' contract with EMI, harming the Sex Pistols "career development," but it brought the cult group to national scapegoat status, and, according to Savage, broke "for ever the fragile Punk unity that ... existed even a few months before. Ambition replaced friendship, stupidity intelligence as the groups queued to strike the simple, brutal poses now required by reporters."[26] Worst of all, for Savage, was the fact that hordes of new punks were created in a moment. The tight control by Malcolm McLaren, and the camaraderie of group with fans, and of group with other groups, was torn apart. Everyone jumped on the bandwagon, every record label in England had to have their punk band, and every bored teenager became a punk. Most importantly, they all seemed to miss the point; as another British rock journalist argued, "the problem with punk was that most punks had no idea of the real meaning of punk which was lost sight of."[27] That is, most "punks" were not truly "punk."

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[23] Burchill and Parsons, 23.

[24] Steve Jones, Sex Pistols' guitarist, quoted in Savage, 260.

[25] Burchill and Parsons, 24.

[26] Savage, 277-278; see also 260 and 275 for other quotes. See also Hebdige, 93.

punk in history

Punks who blame the media for destroying punk and scholars who fix the moment of punk in time to suit their analysis are committing the same mistake. In trying to analyze "punk" instead of "punks," scholars have denied punk a history, and, thus, failed to explore how young people adopted and adapted punk rock to their own ends. Punk rock, in its original incarnation, was a response to *both* musical and social issues. As punks scenes developed in Southern California, young people would continue to use punk to respond to a specific set of musical and social issues of both international and local origin. For all of these authors, the moment of *true* punk existed only so long as the strange, unique, delicate, and tenuous relationship of punk to the ideologies of mass culture and youth culture was maintained.

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[27] John Platt, personal conversation, January 15, 1994.

Greil Marcus had been fooled before. He had seen firsthand the Free Speech Movement in 1964 reduced to posturing and pretension, "ideology and manipulation."[28] He had seen the utopian hopes of a rock'n'roll-based youth revolution dashed on the corporate walls of Capital Records and Warner Brothers in the late sixties.[29] But he was not to be fooled again, he knew there was no opposing mass culture, and there was no such thing as youth culture. Not, at least, anymore, not in the 1970s. Now he pinned his hopes on "detournement," on "cash from chaos," on Johnny Rotten, who "announced what was taken as a youth revolt while denying the status of youth itself: as an antichrist, he claimed all social life as his terrain."[30]

Hebdige, too, saw punk as a "Refusal," one which may not be able to "alter the oppressive mode in which the commodities used in a subculture have been produced," but which could use those commodities in a way that would expose the "fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives."[31] For both Marcus and Hebdige, their faith in punk rested on highlighting those aspects of punk which they embraced, and minimizing those they shunned. Both authors hoped that punk could lead the way out of the transcendent commodification of mass culture, either by burrowing from within or through dissonance disrupting the "teeth-gritting harmony" of the ruling ideology.[32] But then mass culture struck back, and upset the delicate balance of punk.

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[28] Marcus, 445.

[29] See Greil Marcus, "Who Put the Bomp in the Bomp-de-Bomp?" in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture Revisited* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1971).

[30] Marcus, 96.

The dominant media *did* seize the definition of punk from the punks. It did create a static, easily digestible (if heartburn provoking) definition, as the tabloids screamed on about "the filth and fury!" And the scholars are right: what followed was something different. But the tabloids, the televisions, and the global entertainment conglomerates also brought punk rock to the world. What followed was no less "real" than the "original" punk. Most importantly, not only did the dominant media remake punk in its own image, so too did young people throughout the world.

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[31] Hebdige, 130, 132.

[32] The phrase "teeth-gritting harmony" is from Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"; quoted in Hebdige, 133.

Chapter Three: "So This is War, Eh?": The Birth of Punk Rock in Los Angeles

In 1977 a small group of people began to gather in Hollywood to play and listen to punk rock music, dress in punk rock style, and live a punk rock lifestyle. These people created a punk rock "scene" as the voice and forum of "refusal." The scene was based upon a number of unstable oppositions, contradictions and tensions which allowed the it to be the site of considerable creativity and artistic ferment, but never allowed any individuals to maintain control over the scene. In this chapter I will detail the incremental establishment of these oppositions as young people in Los Angeles searching for something new encountered punk and fashioned it in their own image. Due to the instability of these oppositions, from their very beginnings L.A. punk and international punk provided various models for alternative ways of appropriation and reconfiguring. By the end of the decade young people in the greater Los Angeles postsuburban area -- and throughout the country -- built on these models, and once again refashioned punk rock to reflect and affect their own social and cultural needs.

To understand exactly how young people in postsuburbia formed their own punk rock scenes, recreating themselves as punk rockers, depends upon comprehending how the first Los Angelenos brought punk to the city, how they tried to keep control over their subculture, and how they ultimately failed to do so.

The first L.A. punks came from the ranks of the music freaks, the aspiring hipsters, glam and glitter rockers, artists and poets; for whatever their motivations -- and each had his/her own personal story -- these people were the types who actively sought alternative culture, culture to call their own, to form their identities and communities. Gradually, as L.A. and international punk began to make more noise, literally and figuratively, more and more people who may not have been as adventuresome or trend-setting began to associate themselves with punk. Punk rock was first of all music: music that sounded good to those searching for something they considered new, something "real," something they could call their own. But punk rock was more than music. Punk music provided the basis for a subculture, or a set of subcultures in which young people could organize themselves.

fields of punk production

The concept of "fields of cultural production" developed by Pierre Bourdieu provides a helpful way of understanding the internal dynamics of the punk rock scenes of the late-seventies/early-eighties. According to Bourdieu, a social formation is made up of a set of semi-autonomous and hierarchically arranged fields, each with its own internal rules or logic which are related to but not determined by the laws of politics and economy. Aesthetic production is neither simply a reflection of objective social conditions, such as class position, nor the result of the creative genius of an autonomous subject. Bourdieu's concept of the field takes into account the social and economic context, without reducing culture to its effects, while allowing for expression of individual agents, within the rules or dispositions of a given field. Bourdieu argues that cultural production takes place within three levels. First is the larger context, the field of power, determined by the dominant power relations in society, within which all culture is produced. Next comes the structure of the cultural field itself, the relations among agents competing within the field for status or cultural capital. Finally, there is the field of the rules or dispositions which structure aesthetic decisions, and which are in turn structured by those decisions. This last field allows for an analysis of creativity and the agency of individuals, although without ignoring the larger contexts.[1]

Key to Bourdieu's theory is the second level, the field of cultural production itself, which he sees as creating its own semi-autonomous rules according to which individuals play the game and compete for rewards. The rewards may not be economic or of any value within the larger field of power, but are often the most important factor in motivating an individual artist. In the literary field, Bourdieu argues, the structure is defined by the opposition between the two sub-fields of restricted production and large-scale production. The field of large-scale production corresponds roughly to mass or popular culture, where the size of the audience determines rewards. The field of restricted production, however, writes its own rules by inverting the normal system of rewards providing status, distinction and cultural capital to those artists who eschew popularity. In this field the work is produced for other producers, who control the hierarchy of authority through a continuing system of belief and an elaborate social apparatus of awards, publishing houses, museums, and so on which proffer cultural capital within the field. The point is that these rewards, as symbolic capital, and the rules of the game for achieving these awards are often as powerful in motivating artists as any rewards given by the larger social context, such as money.

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

This was certainly true of punk rockers, who, while influenced by, and often keenly aware of, the larger social context, defined their goals and their identities in terms of an evolving set of rules within the field of punk rock. One of the larger fields punks worked both within and against was the field of rock'n'roll. In this sense the music business can be defined as a "field of large scale production" in opposition to punk's self-conscious "field of restricted production." The borders and rules of these fields were always moving and fluctuating, so punk in Los Angeles must be seen above all relationally, as defined by the continually changing rules and language. Within this framework, the punk rock "scenes" in Los Angeles, and internationally, can be defined according the people who participated and their cultural productions.

Sarah Thornton's recent book on British dance music subcultures, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, provides a model for how to structure an examination of the internal dynamics of a subcultural scene. By tracing the establishment antinomies, or "cultural hierarchies" within subcultures, Thornton investigates the search for distinction, what she calls, following Bourdieu, "subcultural capital," both within the club cultures and between the club subcultures and the world outside of those cultures (the "straight," the "mainstream," the mass, the old, etc.). Punk can be examined fruitfully with similar categories of distinction and contestation. It may also be examined through its internal structures and in the oppositions it set up against the rest of the world. The concept of "subcultural capital" allows me to present punk rock in Los Angeles in terms of the relationships -- both within and without the "scene" -- which constitute the cultural hierarchies, the distinctions, the rates of cultural exchange.

Thornton's concept (and it is not hers alone, of course, as it owes not only to Bourdieu, but to the British tradition extending back to E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and the Birmingham School which attempted to see culture as process) helps in studying culture generally, but it works particularly well for punk, I think, as punk was nothing if not contentious. Contestation may be the only thing which unites all punk across space and time, in particular contestation over what is punk. This contestation -- for distinction, for cultural hierarchy -- provided the basis for the relationships which created punk. Nowhere was this more true than in Los Angeles. Thornton argues that,

> Subcultural ideologies are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass.... Distinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others.[2]

L.A. punks thus established their cultural capital first of all by defining their distinction from mainstream rock and pop music, the music business, and the masses who accepted the product the music business shoved into their ears.

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[2] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 10.

do-it-yourself

Stephen Duncombe defines DIY as follows: "Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture."[3] But the implications of DIY can cut at least two ways: DIY can be a way to opt out, or a method of transformation of the dominant culture. The first punks in Los Angeles straddled the two, ambivalent about their relationship with the dominant culture. Later postsuburban hardcore punks rejected explicitly any interaction with the dominant culture.

The DIY ethos attracted young people to punk because of its musical implications. Now, instead of rock music being the purview of only professionals and technocrats, all fans could become active participants. "Do it yourself" meant anyone can do it. As L.A. high school student Falling James remarked upon seeing punk performed for the first time, "If they can do that, I can do it."[4] Like countless others, he picked up the guitar and formed a band immediately. Musically, the sound would of necessity be the most basic of stripped-down rock'n'roll, thus returning the form to its populist roots, away from the classical and artistic pretensions of post-Sgt. Pepper (1967) rock. Importantly, there were many ways to participate in the building of a "scene" through the DIY ethos, such as publishing a zine or even just dressing "punk," in addition to making music. While the idea of doing it yourself was not unique to punk, drawing on postwar youth culture traditions such as fanclubs and rock newsletters and sixties' radical political bulletins and magazines, the transformation of this ethos or discourse reflected the general transformation in youth from the sixties to the seventies to the eighties.

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[3] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 117.

[4] Interview with Falling James, January 11, 1995.

An important model for Southern California punks was Greg Shaw's *Bomp! Magazine* which was one of the first to pay attention to punk and was completely self-published. Greg Shaw was a fanatic about rock'n'roll who as a seventeen-year-old had headed out to the blossoming Haight-Ashbury in 1966 in search of the latest thing in rock, the psychedelic sound and scene of the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin and the Jefferson Airplane. There, he began to publish the first San Francisco-based rock'n'roll magazine, *Mojo-Navigator Rock & Roll News*. As he remembered,

> The music scene was just getting started. The obvious way to get involved with what was happening was to start a 'zine. I had the background. I had a mimeograph machine, I'd been in science fiction fandom, I knew how to edit and publish a magazine. That was *Mojo*.[5]

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[5] "Bomp Records: Twenty Years of Keeping Rock'n'Roll Alive," *Goldmine*, Vol. 21, No. 10, Issue 386, (May 12, 1995), 56.

Mojo-Navigator, after *Crawdaddy!* out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the second American rock'n'roll "zine" -- an independently published magazine dedicated not only to supporting a rock scene but to creating one. Cranked out by hand on Shaw's mimeograph machine, the zine mixed fandom with an active participation in the creation of rock culture, eventually becoming a model for Jann Wenner's *Rolling Stone*.

After *Mojo* folded in 1968 Shaw moved to Los Angeles and in 1970 started *Bomp!*, another mimeo zine. Shaw helped establish a national, even international, network of rock'n'roll fanatics, maintaining a mailing list of thousands of fellow devotees of underground rock. "A scene began to grow around it. Those were the days, 1970 to '72, when rock 'n' roll was lame; there was nothing really happening. Those of us who cared gathered around these little campfires and *Bomp!* was one of them."[6] Bomp was established in explicit rejection of what *Rolling Stone* had already become -- a symbol to Shaw of the corporate infiltration of rock'n'roll.

For Shaw and his ilk, the guiding premise was that there was great rock'n'roll being made, it just wasn't being heard. To them, for brief moments in the fifties and the sixties the great rockers had received mass distribution through the record companies and radio. By the early seventies, for Shaw, barely anything worthwhile could be heard on the radio or found in the bins of the record store chains. Shaw spent his time searching for obscure rock recordings from earlier eras and for the new bands which he believed were continuing the spirit in spite of record company apathy. "Music is becoming an investment industry," Shaw argued in 1978. "Real rock n'roll [sic] is wild experimentation and letting new ideas go crazy and then seeing how they do."[7] Shaw still believed in the power of rock'n'roll to unify youth culture, and in the power of youth culture to change the world. He attempted to bring forth from the sixties the rebellious, underground spirit that he had experienced in the Haight Ashbury: "My standards of teen culture were set at a time when teen culture ruled the world, where people were creating for themselves and were not dictated to by huge corporations."[8] Obviously, Shaw underestimated the corporate influence in sixties' rock, but the conclusions he drew led him to retain the ideals which had brought him to rock fandom in the first place.

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[6] Quoted in *Goldmine*, 56.

Shaw and fans like him were not necessarily anti-capitalist, or anti-mass culture, but went underground because of the lack of mainstream interest in what they saw as "real" rock'n'roll. Further, the experience of "underground culture" created the opportunity for "involvement in a creative experience" that the passive experience of consumption denied to youth: "[T]he best culture is one that involves everybody, it's participatory.... You are not a passive consumer."[3]

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[7] "Greg Shaw Interview," *Panic* [L.A.] No. 1, (June 1978), 21.

[8] "Greg Shaw," *Flipside* [Whittier] 89 (April/May 1994), n.p.

For Shaw and friends, rock'n'roll -- *real* rock'n'roll, *true* rock'n'roll, however they defined it -- provided the impetus and center to the creative experience which defined the underground culture. As Lisa Fancher, who went to work for Shaw at *Bomp!* as a sixteen-year-old in 1975 from Sun Valley at the entrance to the San Fernando Valley, and later started her own fanzine *Biff! Bang! Pow!*, wrote in a letter to a New York fanzine: "I've gone through "above-ground" jobs like the L.A. TIMES, SOUNDS, RECORD MIRROR real fast because I'm not willing to write about anything or take bullshit from various editors who know absolutely NOTHING about Rock & Roll, but [only] about being industry peons." Fancher, like Shaw, established her identity by her opposition to the music business and by her willingness to sacrifice anything to save the soul of rock'n'roll for the future:

> See I have a real idealistic, MORAL philosophy toward future rockers. I feel bad they have to listen to the things they do on the radio and read they things they do in CIRCUS [a mainstream rock fan magazine]. I don't hate them or think they're

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[3] *Flipside* 89.

> stupid -- we haven't done our job in getting the alternatives to them.[10]

Fans like Fancher and Shaw believed they had to take it upon themselves to do the hard work necessary -- starting their own zines, writing letters to other diehard fans around the globe -- to save the spirit of rock'n'roll and deliver it to the youth of America. Part of what involvement in the underground culture meant was proselytizing to those who had no other access to the underground, who were isolated and captive to the industry. They retained a faith in the ability of youth to choose real rock if given the opportunity. Shaw argued, "I really believe that we have to get to the masses.... We need more kids.... I can't believe that kids are such sheep that they will buy anything stuffed down their throats by the companies."[11]

In response to the bleak prospects for good music reaching the public, Shaw became a record "producer." He formed Bomp Records only because the bands he liked couldn't get signed by the major labels. Bomp, Shaw later claimed, was the first truly independent record label for rock music in the country, with no ties to any of the major labels or distributors.[12] Bomp pressed 1000 copies of a single by the Flamin' Groovies in 1974, distributing them all through mail order in the absence of any other network for national independent record distribution. Over the next few years Bomp released singles by Beatles-influenced cult bands, an album by Iggy Pop, and compilations of sixties' garage rock bands in the *Pebbles* series. Shaw and others embraced a "do-it-yourself" ethic as an alternative way of realizing the older ideals of youth culture and mass culture, not as a rejection of them. Their goal was to create an inclusive youth culture based on rock'n'roll.

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[10] Lisa Fancher, letter to the editor, *Rockin' in the Fourth Estate* No. 2, (Spring 1979), 3. Fancher would go on to found Frontier Records, an important hardcore punk label.

[11] *Panic* No. 1, 21.

The first punks in Los Angeles were not quite as hopeful as Shaw, although they did not reject outright, at least not initially, the possibilities of harnessing mass culture and youth culture to their own ends. L.A. punks were more interested in establishing terms of distinction for themselves. Los Angeles punks defined distinction above all aesthetically, by the style of dress and the sound of the music. From the beginning, "performance" was key to the L.A. punk aesthetic and ideology. While many of the first people attracted to punk in L.A. came from the tiny rock underground, many of those had been attracted to rock'n'roll, especially glam, for its theatricality. Further, if these rockers had attempted to resurrect the rock'n'roll "spirit," much of that spirit concerned attitude rather than technical proficiency. Finally, a significant section of the new punk scene came to punk not only for the music, in pursuit of a revitalized rock'n'roll, but for an outlet for artistic expression -- members of the Weirdos and Screamers, for example, had been artists before becoming punks, and there was considerable crossover in attendance at performance art and punk shows in Los Angeles.[13] From the beginning, L.A. punk was set up on a number of unstable contradictions, reflected in their use of the DIY ethos as both an extension of sixties' idealism and a rejection.

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[12] *Flipside* 89. Shaw claimed Sky Dog in France was the first in the world, and he believed that Bomp was the model for Stiff Records, the first independent in England.

diy and distinction

The catalyzing events for punk rock in L.A. occurred in the spring of 1977. On April 16th, the Damned, the first English punk band to appear on vinyl, held an in-store appearance at the Bomp store and many of the people who were there would become the first in town to call themselves punk rockers. That night the Weirdos, Germs and Zeros played their first Hollywood shows. Alice Armendariz, soon to be Alice Bag, lead singer of the Bags, remembered,

> The first punk show I saw was the Zeros and the Germs and the Weirdos. I was just sold. Here were people my own age doing something different and exciting and new. The Germs had peanut butter up onstage and they smeared it all over each

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[13] See Kristine McKenna, "Burned Bridges & Vials of Blood," in Don Snowden, ed., *Make the Music Go Bang: The Early L.A. Punk Scene* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 39-45.

> other. They didn't really play. I don't remember it being musical as much as performance.[14]

Two nights later the Damned played at a local club, with the band's manager running onstage yelling, "You fat Americans in your Cadillacs disgust me!" One new punk remembered, "Rat Scabies had baby powder on his drum set, so there was a big cloud around him, and Captain Sensible was always pulling down his pants or taking a piss onstage. That was all the norm."[15] When the Damned "charged through the sloppy, intense, shambles of a set at the Starwood," L.A. punk Craig Lee later wrote, "the L.A. kids immediately picked up of the energy and theatricality of the band."

Punk in L.A. democratized performance art, previously an avant-garde phenomenon, as L.A. punks declared themselves "art-damaged."[16] "Punk was like when you first discover folk art as some wonderful thing," KK Bennett of the Screamers remembered. "[A]ll of a sudden you like the mistakes, the handicraft of it, the personal naiveté."[17] And, as with folk art, anyone could do it, everyone could participate. Lee argues that the theatricality of the Damned attracted budding L.A. punks, setting the terms of distinction for "fashion anarchy and musical chaos." The New York punk sound and sense was "too cool, too pseudo-intellectual, too *boring* for the California set."[18] In the absence of any explicit political ideology, punks in L.A. established their identities and subcultural boundaries through aesthetics.

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[14] Jeff Spurrier, "Los Angeles Punk Rock," *Details*, (December 1994), 120.

[15] Spurrier, 119.

[16] For example, *Wasteland* [L.A.] No. 3 (1978), 8: Darby Crash interview: "I got art-damage.... Art damage is like you aren't supposed to smile in pictures"; and, *Generation X* [N. Hollywood] #5, (1978), 8: "All the groups in this town are art damaged."

[17] Spurrier, 119.

The aesthetics of punk -- the sound of the music, the style of the performance, and the emotion inspired -- initially defined the subcultural borders. L.A. punk Craig Lee remembered that the Damned's performance made people in the crowd "FEEL SOMETHING," a feeling which they began to realize they shared with others: "By the end of the Damned set, people looked around, some with a shock of recognition on their faces. Bonds were forming. The poseurs were being separated from the possessed."[19] Chip Kinman, Dils guitarist: "[A]fter those shows you knew you had to make a choice. You had to either fish or cut bait. That's when you got the first group of punks."[20] The memories of Lee and Kinman are instructive, even if not quite accurate. The shows *were* key in bringing together a small group of people around something new and exciting. But the time had not yet come to separate the "poseurs" from the "possessed," it was not yet necessary to "fish or cut bait." In Hollywood there was no single pose yet, as a pose can only be defined in opposition to something defined as real, and "real punk rock" was only beginning to be defined in Los Angeles. The meaning of punk would be continually contested over the years, but no one had a hold on it yet in early-1977. Lee and Kinman's memories are important, though, because they highlight how much the search for distinction was a key constitutive element in the punk rock identity in L.A. And it was at this moment, Lee writes, when "a definite punk core was forming" in Los Angeles, a core which would help to make L.A. punk something cohesive and distinctive.

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[18] Craig Lee, "Los Angeles," in Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, eds., *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1983), 11.

[19] Lee, in *Hardcore California*, 11.

[20] Spurrier, 119-120.

As a musical, artistic, bohemian expression in New York, punk had announced an opposition to the stagnation of mainstream rock'n'roll. In England, punk became an important social phenomenon because it reflected the working-class anger and anomie at a specific moment in British history: punk seemed to signify on an everyday level the larger political significance of the breakdown of both the postwar welfare state and the empire as a whole. The first Los Angeles punks combined and adapted much of the style, ideology, and sound of both New York and London punk to create their own distinctive subcultural scene. There were some people looking for something exciting to do and there were some people listening for some new rock'n'roll. Drawn to punk rock in Los Angeles because punk, imported from New York and London, seemed to fulfill both needs, they then established a "scene" based upon how punk fit their particular local needs, in particular their needs for cultural and subcultural capital. That is, the scene became a scene at precisely the moment when the terms for establishing distinction were set.

Hollywood punks established three institutions between the spring of 1977 and the spring of 1978 which allowed them to cohere as a scene: *Slash* magazine, the Masque club and the Canterbury apartment complex, and all these institutions fostered the contestation and search for distinction at the root of Hollywood punk.

Editor Kickboy Face (French émigré, bohemian dishwasher Claude Bessy) announced *Slash*'s arrival, and its punk sensibility, in his first editorial "So This Is War, Eh?" dated Mayday 1977. After surveying the reaction in England to punk, Kickboy announced,

> This publication was born out of curiosity and out of hope. Curiosity regarding what looks like a possible rebirth of true rebel music, hope in its eventual victory over the bland products professional pop stars have been feeding us. May the punks set this rat-infested industry on fire.

Slash, in its pursuit of "true rebel music," voiced from the beginning a hatred of the music business. Anchoring its definition of punk in a "war" against the record industry, *Slash* moved out to discredit the music the business had produced in the seventies -- progressive rock (with "their concept albums, their cosmic discoveries and their pseudophilosophical inanities") and "the dreadful dripping sounds of disco," both of which emphasized technological fetishism and professional artisanship over performance and emotion. In opposition, the "punk revolution" embraced the "dirty primitive music that has little to do with the stuff music stations have been pouring in our ears for what seems to be an eternity."[21]

Slash's opening editorial served as a sort of performative gesture designed to create a (counter) public that did not yet really exist. As such, it served also to bring together people as punks, it helped to crystallize a scene. As one punk remembered: "In May of '77 I saw the first issue of *Slash* and thought, 'Wow, there's a scene going on!' They kind of put it together."[22] As Lee described the early *Slash*, "The words flew out fast, furious, disconnected, a code that only those in the know could truly understand. One felt slightly out of it if they didn't know what *Slash* was ranting about."[23] "[R]esolutely committed to the anger and fury of Punk ... [with] an almost Biblical fire-and-brimstone righteousness,"[24] *Slash* provided the signature L.A. punk voice. Bessy later remembered, "*Slash* started as a bluff. We were pretending there was an

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[21] *Slash* [L.A.], Vol. 1, No. 1, (May 1977), 3.

[22] Trudie Arguelles quoted in Spurrier, 121.

[23] Lee in *Hardcore California*, 11.

[24] Lee in *Hardcore California*, 11.

LA scene when there was no scene whatsoever. The magazine was it.... Then all these disaffected loonies started focusing on the mag and decided 'We can be it, too.'"[25]

That summer Brendan Mullen -- self described as a "young, white, under-educated, unemployed, Scottish-Irish hippie illegal immigrant -- not terrifically talented or gifted in any specific way and, as is the curse of the under-achiever with too much time, I was of course bored, bored, desperately BORED" -- opened the Masque in a Hollywood basement, a site which became a punk club almost by accident as punks began to gather there for parties and, eventually, shows. By the beginning of the next year the core group of about fifty punks began to move into the Canterbury apartment complex down the road. The institutions to maintain a small, local scene were set.

"a group of misfits like me"

Starting as a search for new and exciting music, L.A. punk had expanded to attack the music business. In doing so it embraced a whole new style of performance, and created a new local subculture with international ties. The subcultural capital that L.A. punks had acquired by the end of 1977 was increasingly gathered in opposition to the world outside. Key to the creation of a subculture was the identification punks felt with others like themselves. As Nicole Panter, manager of the Germs, recalled, "When we found each other at the Masque, there was a sense of cohesion."[26] The cohesion was fortified at the Canterbury, as punks bounced from room to room having sex, taking drugs, making music, and building community in an impersonal city. L.A. punk Geza X remembered how this living situation fostered the punk spirit of community and the breakdown of barriers between performer and fan:

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[25] Quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 437.

> The Masque started attracting a faithful audience and people in bands. They were your next-door neighbors and your idols at the same time, so all the barriers between star and the audience were completely shattered. It was the same thing at the Canterbury: You'd be living next door to someone in a band you absolutely idolized -- and this was someone you ate dinner with. So like your best friend was also your biggest hero.[27]

Unlike mainstream rock'n'roll, where the star and the audience existed in completely different, unconnected worlds, punk rock provided an environment where the punks were the stars, they were all part of a community of "stars." As Alice Bag remembered, "It was the first time in my life I had the feeling of belonging to something, a sense of community. Here I was in the middle of a group of misfits like me -- people from broken homes and runaways."[28]

By early 1978, as punks were beginning to move into the

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[26] Spurrier, 124.

[27] Geza X in Spurrier, 119.

[28] Spurrier, 120.

Canterbury, the scene had solidified to some degree. There was a core of people who called themselves "punk," who found a sense of community and identity with each other. There was an identifiable "scene" -- that is, a cohesiveness in personnel, ideology, and artistic output, but a diversity in each as well. The rest of the United States was beginning to hear more and more about punk, however, and the small core of insiders found that they did not control the meaning of or access to punk. Like other subcultures, and like punk subcultures before them, the L.A. punks had a keen sense of insider/outsider distinction. Already by late 1977, barely months into the L.A. punk scene being at all recognizable as "punk" or as a "scene," the insider/outsider distinction was fiercely, and as it would turn out, continually contested. "At this point the Punk scene had become very in-bred and cliquish," Craig Lee wrote a few years later. "There was a lot of talk about who was a 'poseur' and who wasn't. Commitment and sincerity were essential, and one had to have punk credibility to join the clan." The establishment of credentials for who was a real punk was what Lee called "self-destructive protectiveness," the fruitless attempt to maintain control over the scene, the meaning of punk, and the sound of the music. But the exclusiveness of what Lee called the "Hollywood 50" contained with in it several contradictions.

If "style dictated commitment," as Lee argued, then all it took was style to demonstrate commitment. Further, part of what L.A. punk attempted to do was to "make Punk break through the limited music scene barriers," fashioning something different from the typical rock scene's striving for hipness. But, those who found "community" and "cohesion" in the punk scene also wanted to exclude others. "Gangs" -- more like cliques -- of girls and young women like the Piranhas and the Plungers began to square off against one another in the halls of the Canterbury and the Masque. The "Hollywood 50" mocked those from pre-punk bands like the Quick, though they shared the stages at local clubs. Still, the insiders could not maintain control of punk, which was an international phenomenon, and they were not always certain how tight a grip to maintain on their local scene. *Slash*, after all, publicized the goings-on at the Canterbury, even inviting readers to move there too; while many of its readers could be classified as insiders, many more were simply interested and curious.[23]

For L.A. punks the problem was exacerbated by their particular definition of punk as it was developing: punk was about commitment, but it was also about conversion. The first Hollywood punks came from all over the greater L.A. basin, traveling in to shows from over the Hollywood hills via the 101 freeway, coming from Pasadena and Whittier to the east and Venice to the west on the 10, driving even up from San Diego, Carlsbad, and Fullerton on the 405. Punks came from all over the vast, postsuburban area, but once they arrived, the rules of punk dictated that they leave their pasts and other identities behind and recreated themselves as "punks." Once punks began to move into the Canterbury, punk became a full-time endeavor, not just a "style" for a Saturday night on the town as in glam and disco, but a "lifestyle" to be performed all day as well as all night. Punk clothes were not to be worn only for shows, to demonstrate one's music preference, but all the time, to identify one's identity, and making it impossible to be anything else but a punk.

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[23] *Slash* announced in the monthly "Local Shit" column,

> Rather than face the usual monthly 'too much loud music' evictions, a lot of the local contingent has been moving into the Canterbury Apts. on N. Cherokee. Now, instead of the usual 'turn it down' game, everyone's playing 'let's outdo our neighbor.' Reasonable rents, close to buses, the Masque, Hollywood Blvd.'s lovely boutiques....

Vol. 1, No. 9 (April 1978), 4.

This problem of maintaining control over the scene played out in an interesting way in Hollywood, because the problem centered on a question of authenticity in a town founded on the celebration of falsity and fantasy. The search for authenticity lies at the heart of the attempt at distinction in much of American popular culture, and the direct, unmediated communication of experience and emotion, without artifice or commercial considerations, distinguishes so much of popular and unpopular music from "pop" music. As the sociologist Simon Frith put it in describing the ideology of rock music: "Rock, in contrast to pop, carries intimations of sincerity, authenticity, art -- noncommercial concerns. These intimations have been muffled since rock became the record industry, but it is the possibilities, the promises, that matter."[30] Much of folk, country, jazz, rap and rock differentiates itself from Tin Pan Alley, Broadway or Top 40 by its emphasis on what Barry Shank calls "performed sincerity."[31] Punk rock was no exception. But how authenticity is structured differs according to subculture and musical category. "Music is perceived as authentic when it *rings true* or *feels real*, when it has *credibility* and comes across as *genuine*," Sarah Thornton argues, providing a revealing way of understanding the varieties of authenticities:

> In an age of endless representations and global mediation, the experience of musical authenticity is perceived as a cure both for alienation (because it offers feelings of community) and dissimulation (because it extends a sense of the really "real"). As such, it is valued as a balm for media fatigue and as an antidote to commercial hype. In sum, authenticity is to music what happy endings are to Hollywood cinema -- the reassuring reward for suspending disbelief.[32]

Authenticity is, then, the performance of reality and solidarity. L.A. punk did not oppose the surrounding tinseltown falsity simply by insisting on honesty or sincerity or authenticity, as those were, people in the know knew, the most false facades both the movies and pop music had ever designed. This is why London punk provided a greater inspiration to Los Angelenos than the New York version. Just about every New York band other than the Ramones carried an aura of sophistication, sincerity, or decadence that struck L.A. punks-to-be as faux-verite.

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[30] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 11.

[31] Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[32] Thornton, 26.

Thornton also argues that authenticity has to do double work, promoting "originality and aura" while depicting what is "natural to the community or organic to the subculture." While artistic and subcultural forms of authenticity usually work together, Thornton argues, they are not the same thing.[33] In Los Angeles, punks developed an ironic stance on authenticity -- "art-damaged" -- which allowed the tensions between the two versions to coexist, and created a bit of openness to the punk scene, a fluidity in cultural hierarchies.

"forming"

The first self-proclaimed punks in Los Angeles wrestled with the universals provided by the previous generation. Many of the first L.A. punks were old enough to remember sixties rock and the sixties' ideals, but were less sanguine about their place in society and dissatisfied with the outcome of the sixties' youth movements and rock revival. *Slash* magazine typified the tension within the scene as to whether punk was supposed to be a revolution *within* the system or a revolution *against* it. Some punks hoped that punk would destroy rock'n'roll and the music business as it currently existed, while others saw punk as the next big thing that would sweep the industry. Most punks oscillated between the two positions. Punks were allowed to waver between two positions because at least two positions were available; that is, punks were not dependent on the major labels to spread their music, they could do it themselves.

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[33] Thornton, 30.

By the middle of the 1970s it was possible, with a minor capital outlay, to record a couple of songs on a four-track recorder in a garage or jerry-rigged studio, press the recording into a 45-single, print up a black-and-white sleeve and sell several hundred copies at punk shows and through local record stores on consignment. The A-side of the Germs' first single was recorded on a two-track in the guitarist's mother's garage, while the B-side was recorded with a handheld recorder at a live show. The Plugz recorded their first album live in the studio (with no overdubs) and released it on their own label.

Labels started by punks and those interested in punk -- usually older people (mid to late 20s) who had accumulated a few hundred dollars of savings and a smattering of recording equipment -- began to spring up. *Slash* magazine started a record label, releasing singles and albums by local bands such as the Germs, X, and the Flesh Eaters. Dangerhouse, What?, and Upsetter Records, all formed by twenty-something punks, released records by local punk bands in 1978 and 1979. All these recordings, especially as they were played almost instantly on "Rodney on the Roq" on Sunday nights, made punk available throughout the region to those who could not make it all the way into Hollywood on a Saturday night. Thus, while the motives behind the do-it-yourself punk movement were mostly musical initially, at least in Los Angeles, the results made both the music and the ethos more widely available.

Similarly, punks began to publish and distribute their own zines. While *Slash* was a professionally (though cheaply) printed four-color tabloid size magazine, most zines were typed and handwritten, photocopied, folded and stapled by punks. Writing and circulating a zine was one way to be a punk, as valid as being in a band. Taken individually, each of the zines had a clubby, insider tone to it; but taken together as a group they represent a broad range of interests, and desires. Phast Phreddie Patterson's *Back Door Man* (Torrance), *I Wanna Be Your Dog* (Hollywood and Paris), *Raw Power* (Woodland Hills), and *Bomp!* (Hollywood) were all rock fanzines which covered punk as part of their search for the latest best thing. And a slew of gossipy, excited zerox zines emerged over the year to participate as insiders in the punk scene. *Generation X* came out of Hollywood in 1977, edited by Jade Zebest and Zandra. *Lobotomy -- the brainless magazine*, "produced and directed by Pleasant and Randy Detroit" emerged in late 1977 from Beverly Hills. *The Panic* put out by Diana and Michelle, started in June 1978. And Joanne K. and friends produced *Nihil Opinionated Magazine* in 1978. Most of these zines were typed or hand-written, cut and pasted, and photocopied, anywhere from 20 to 100 copies. Punks distributed them at shows, at Shaw's Bomp store and a few other record stores, and through the mail. Zine writers discussed a range of issues and events from local shows and gossip to international punk recordings and happenings to diatribes and manifestos on the meaning of punk. These zines were just the first of what would be a constant stream to cover and create a punk scene that was largely ignored, if not reviled, in the commercial media.

The do-it-yourself ethos produced a particular aesthetic within L.A. punk. Recordings began to proliferate, despite the fact that major record companies showed no interest in L.A. punk. They had seen what the Sex Pistols had done in England, and they assumed punk was a British thing that would never catch on in the States. Driven, then, by necessity, L.A. punks began committing their artistic output to vinyl through fledgling independent record labels. As early as July 1977 Chris Ashford had released L.A. punk's first single, on his new What? Records, a two-track recording of the Germs "Forming" backed with a live version of "Sex Boy." On "Forming," recorded in the guitarist's mother's garage, punk aesthetics and punk technology meet as Bobby Pyn sings "Rip them down/hold me up/tell them that/I'm your gun/Pull my trigger/I am bigger thaaannnn..." through the right channel, while all the musical tracks come through the left speaker. Then, after singing the verses and chorus, Pyn rants in whiny monotone, "Whoever would buy this shit is a fuckin' jerk, he's playing it all wrong, the drums are too slow, the bass is too fast, the chords are wrong, he's making the ending too long ... ah quit," and then the vocal track cuts out with an audible buzz as the musicians finish off the song. The b-side "Sex Boy" sounds even worse, as you can hear people talking and bottles breaking over the sound of the music.[34] As the *Flipside* reviewer wrote, "I think this little, lousey (sic) shitty piece of vinyl, has got to be the best thing Bomp has ever stocked in the singles section. I mean, it's the last name in raunchy. As far as singles go. I mean, it's so shitty. It's mastered lousy."[35] Rodney Bingenheimer thought the record was "very well produced": "That's the sound everybody else is looking for, the garage sound."[36] The record captured the aesthetic of the L.A. version of the punk revolution; it was a sound only the "committed" could appreciate, and the L.A. *Times* did not even review it.

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[34] The song was supposedly "surreptitiously recorded at an abortive casting call for Cheech and Chong's *Up in Smoke*." Chris Morris, "Darby Crash: The American Sid Vicious," *Request*, (August 1995), 44.

[35] *Flipside*, No. 1 (August 1977), n.p.

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[36] Interview with Rodney, *Flipside* No. 5 (Dec 1977), n.p.

Chapter Four: "Get Off the Air": Punk, Power Pop, New Wave, and the Aesthetics of Distinction

Punks in Los Angeles tried to maintain control over their scene by creating a sound and a look that would exclude the faint of heart. But those punks could not maintain that control for a number of reasons. First, the contestations at the root of punk made it so that members of the "scene" would never be able to agree exactly on what was punk. Also, with more and more people interested in punk, the Hollywood scene would be assailed from at least two sides: the mainstream record industry, which began to take notice of the popularity of punk and new wave, and the hordes of young people throughout the greater Los Angeles region who would see in punk a channel for their own dissatisfaction.

the sex pistols in the u.s.a.

"Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?" asked Johnny Rotten at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco on January 14, 1978. With that, the Sex Pistols left the stage, calling it quits altogether the next day as their manager Malcolm McLaren tried to cart them off to Brazil for a recording session and publicity opportunity with Ronnie Biggs, Britain's notorious Great Train Robber. Rotten, increasingly at odds with McLaren, said no thanks, in less polite terms, and that was the end of punk rock. Sid

Vicious went off to shoot heroin with some punkettes, OD'ing that night and again three days later on a plane to New York, eventually hooking up with the remaining Pistols to fly to Rio.

When the Sex Pistols arrived in San Francisco to play their final show of the tour -- what turned out to be their final show ever -- over 5000 people showed up at long-time local promoter Bill Graham's Winterland Ballroom. Two local punk bands opened the show, bringing their fans. A contingent of punks from a budding scene in Los Angeles drove north in great expectation. From New York, Legs McNeil and John Holstrom, the founders of *Punk* magazine, brought with them their resentment that the Sex Pistols had stolen punk rock from the New Yorkers. The responses of punks from S.F., L.A., and N.Y. are illuminating. Even more instructive are the responses of others who came to see the show out of curiosity and left transformed.

From an "objective" standpoint, the show was a fiasco. The sound system was atrocious. Onstage, Sid Vicious was playing high on heroin (after being reined in by his handlers up to that moment on the tour), barely hitting the strings throughout the set, his amplifier turned off most of the time so as not to destroy the sound further. While drummer Paul Cook and guitarist Steve Jones did their best to hold the sound and fury together, Johnny Rotten looked bored, annoyed, hanging onto the mike "like a man caught in a wind tunnel," as Greil Marcus wrote.[1] Backstage, Pistols' manager McLaren was trying, without success, to match powerego's with S.F.'s heavyweight promoter Graham. And the Pistols were behaving like the rock stars they were. Was punk rock, after all, no more than "the great rock'n'roll swindle"?[2] When Johnny Rotten droned on in the last song, "this is no fun, no fun, no fun," for him punk rock was over, but for countless others it was just beginning. Punk was dead just at the moment of its ascendence. The Sex Pistols album had just been released in the U.S. the previous November, and the word was still spreading.

New York punks were, predictably, the harshest critics of the show, resentful as they were that London punks were getting all the credit and fame for something they felt they had invented.[3] For Legs McNeil, whom the Pistols personally snubbed after the show, "The Winterland show was the worst Rock'n'Roll show I've ever seen."[4] San Francisco and Los Angeles punks, whose scenes were still nascent and self-contained, were more ambivalent. L.A. punk Craig Lee's memories were conflicted. On the one hand he had looked forward to the tour as the moment when the "punk revolution" could move beyond its "cult status"; on the other hand, he was disappointed at the lack of "commitment" from those in the audience who seemed to be merely playing at punk. The San Francisco punks who played in the local bands the Nuns and Avengers who had performed at the Winterland show remembered, mostly with dismay, how the audience at the show had bought into the hype surrounding the performance. "Innocence" had been replaced with "sensationalism ... spectacle," "punk" became the "punk circus."[5] Vale, who published San Francisco's *Search & Destroy* punk zine, remembered, "It was a zombie performance, people who were already dead, reanimated for a while, going through their motions. [The Sex Pistols] were media-saturated, they'd run out of message to deliver.[6] And Pat Ryan, Nuns' bassist: "So what you had from there on in was the suburbs moving in. You had people who had a preconceived idea of what it was about, going to Winterland. People who were really not part of the scene coming in and just being voyeurs."[7]

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[1] Quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 458.

[2] *The Great Rock'n'roll Swindle* is the name of the McLaren-inspired film of the Sex Pistol's history.

[3] Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me*.

[4] Quoted in Savage, 460. See also his article for *Punk* [N.Y.] #14 (May/June 1978): "The concert sucks. Johnny Rotten is boring. The sound is horrible. I have a feeling Bill Graham fucked up the sound on purpose," 47.

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[5] See quotes from members of the Nuns and Avengers in Stark, 41-43 and *Search and Destroy* [S.F.] no. 6, (1978), 13, quoted in Peter Belsito's essay on San Francisco punk in Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, eds., *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1983), 77.

[6] Quoted in Savage, 457-458.

Those who were knowledgeable, who already considered themselves punks, were now depressed or disturbed, but those who were just introduced were excited. The people at the show who were playing at punk, who were aping the media's depiction of what a punk should be -- many of them were in the process of conversion, of becoming punks just like those who had come around earlier. For them, the show was the best thing they had ever seen. As one L.A. rocker wrote in his fanzine at the time, "It's real Rock'n'Roll. Forget about the media punk tag--these guys are Rockers. ... As for what I came to see -- The Pistols -- they were really hot...."[8] But others couldn't, or wouldn't, strip it down to such pure musical terms. They embraced the show for its very punk-ness, swindle or no. Randy and Pleasant wrote in L.A.'s *Lobotomy*,

> You can't look at it like it was a concert, it was an event. If you didn't go, you missed the children's crusades...a holy experience...there's no excuse for you!!! So what if you would've lost your job?...Big deal, your car broke down!...Who cares if you'd go broke?..So you'd live on the streets for a month or two! FUCK YOU AND YOUR PROBLEMS!!!!![9]

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[7] Pat Ryan, Nuns' bass player, in James Stark, *Punk 77: An Insider's Look at the San Francisco Rock'n'roll Scene, 1977* (San Francisco: Stark Grafix, 1992), 41-42.

[8] Stephen Zepeda, *The L.A. Beat* [Long Beach] #One, (Feb. 1978), 17.

[9] Randy and Pleasant, "Sex Pistols at Winterland, San Francisco," *Lobotomy* [L.A.] vol. 1, ish#3, (February 1978), n.p.

If Randy and Pleasant bubbled a little too enthusiastically for a distanced, ironic, "art-damaged" stance, Kickboy Face caught the difficult position in the pages of *Slash*, the main punk zine in Los Angeles:

> So here we were, with the pathetic choice of snubbing the snobs or being like the sheep someone obviously wanted us to be ....
> ... The Pistols walk on stage and they burst thru the millions of layers of hype and shit and slander that have surrounded them since the beginning of time (well, who remembers anything prior to '76?) ... and Rotten just eases his way thru the set like an eel, playing it up, playing it down, constantly surprising the most jaded observers with his thoroughly unique approach to rock'n'roll singing....
>
> Those Southern preachers picketing their gigs in Georgia or whatever are completely right: This is the menace, this is what destruction and mayhem will look like, when it finally comes. If Rotten *really* means half of his lyrics civilization is indeed in trouble. I pray that he does, 'cause I know there's some kind of god out there for this breed of angels.[10]

As bad as the show was, it was still the closest thing to something real, not an ordinary social fact, ...*this is actually happening*... And for someone who had had no exposure to punk, who had been brought to the Winterland show by the mass media hoopla, who came as an observer, expecting little, who came as a suburban teenager and left a punk, this show changed the course of history:

> I grew up thinking that everything had already happened. The Beatles, the Beach Boys, Beethoven, Bread. That Elvis Presley crushed

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[10] Kickboy Face, "Other People's Misery," *Slash* [L.A.} Vol 1, No. 8, (February 1978), 18-21. Elsewhere in the same issue Bird Protractor refers to the show as "rather disappointing," 24.

> McCarthyism in America, the Beatles elected JFK, and the Rolling Stones were responsible for the rise and fall of Robert Kennedy. After which the Doors singlehandedly ended the war in Vietnam. I grew up thinking that rock music mattered, but that everything worth hearing had already been laid down on vinyl, that the glorious days were long since passed.... In short, I grew up thinking I was born too late.
>
> And then one night I went to see the Sex Pistols, and from then on I knew that I'd been completely wrong. I hadn't been born late at all. It was just that everybody else had been entirely premature, doomed to incubate things for better days to come. I was just a child then, a tubby and insecure white suburban high schooler, but when I saw the Sex Pistols, I went totally ballistic. A great chasm of possibility immediately yawned open, a canyon of hope that simply hadn't been there before. And I leapt into its breach, my friends. I dove on in.[11]

The same performance which had disgusted the New Yorkers, which had ended the era of punk rock led by the Pistols, and which had weakened so many San Francisco and L.A. punks' faith in the revolution, brought a new convert -- no artist or bohemian, no worker on the dole, just a tubby little suburbanite. She would leave behind the sixties, insert herself into the narrative and obliterate the whole history she had been taught -- a history in which the histories of youth culture and mass culture were intertwined. She would do all that through punk rock.

The day after the Sex Pistols show, L.A. punks returned home to discover the Masque had been shut down by the Fire Marshall for numerous code violations. The following month, the distinction, or set of distinctions, within L.A. punk and between punk and the larger music world, were highlighted at a benefit concert for the Masque. Seventeen bands came together to perform at the Elks Lodge in downtown L.A., raising $4300 for Mullen's legal fees needed to fight against the landlord's eviction proceedings. Whereas less than a year earlier there had been no club for punk, and no scene to speak of, and maybe not even one person in L.A. who would have called him/herself a "punk," now, over two consecutive nights, punk bands of various stripes gathered to showcase the talents of the L.A. scene, headlined by the deans of L.A. punk -- the post-teenage nihilist, day-glo pogoers the Weirdos, and the Screamers, with their multimedia "synth hysteria" led by hypnotic frontman Tomata Du Plenty.[12]

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[11] Gina Arnold, *Route 666: On the Road to Nirvana* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 3.

The shows were big enough news in L.A. to warrant two articles in the L.A. *Times,* the first a short review of the Friday night performances by Kristine McKenna, and the second a longer overview entitled "A Positive Perspective on Punk" by Robert Hilburn, the *Times'* pop music major domo. The fact that Hilburn deigned to write on punk signalled its arrival as a musical force, and this was his first acknowledgment of the L.A. scene. He cited approvingly

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[12] The bands performing on the nights of February 24 & 25, 1978 were: Zeros, Eyes, Screamers, Germs, Controllers, Bags, Deadbeats, Weirdos, Dickies, Shock, Skulls, Alley Cats, Black Randy, F-Word, Flesh Eaters, Plugz, X. The phrase "synth hysteria" is from Jon Savage, 584.

Mullen's attempt "to demonstrate that the L.A. punk scene is a positive, rather than negative social and musical force. However aggressive some of the bands and rambunctious some of the audience, the overriding spirit is one of **fun**."[13] Punk was achieving respectability. Musically, McKenna concluded, "While still too primitive for most tastes, the best of these bands offer a valid, if inconsistent alternative to slick mainstream rock product."[14] It was agreed, then, in theory at least, that punk provided a much needed antidote to corporate rock, a restorative to the rock'n'roll tradition. But it was not agreed as to whether and how punk actually reached these goals. A few months earlier Hilburn had declared that punk -- and here he was reviewing New York bands, ignoring the local scene -- provided "a colorful, invigorating alternative to the smooth polished approach that has characterized pop music in recent years," but he still maintained that most punk bands "have a vital, but narrow sound" and their "spirit exceeds [their] vision."[15] Hilburn maintained certain standards of musicality rejected by punks.

By February 1978 more punk bands were closer to meeting those standards. In part, this was a question of proficiency. Punk bands had now been rehearsing and performing for several months; even the Germs occasionally managed to perform a song that actually sounded something like music to more traditional ears. But it wasn't only that. The distinction punks craved was a matter not only of self-description, but of aesthetics as well.

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[13] L.A. *Times*, February 28, 1978, sec. IV.

[14] L.A. *Times*, February 27, 1978, sec. IV.

[15] L.A. *Times*, Sept 27, 1977, sec. IV.

The *Times* critics still did not hear what many in the audience heard. To the fans of the music, L.A. punk would not be simply a return to rock'n'roll tradition -- a reworking of the combination of teen rebellion, R&B and C&W which had fueled earlier generations of rock'n'rollers. For them, something new was going on musically. Two years later X would release the album "Los Angeles" which would top the *Times*' critics best-of-the-year lists, but after the Masque show Hilburn wrote, "The X band was mostly routine."[16] Certainly, X improved in so many ways over the next two years, enough that Hilburn could recognize their work, but that was not all that happened. L.A. punk -- and other punk and postpunk music throughout the U.S. and England -- over that time began to transform, if only slightly, the expectations of mainstream rock critics and, in a different way, music business executives. One of the barriers, though not immovable, one of the distinctions, though not immutable, remained in February of 1978. That was the sound of the music. In contrast to the *Times*, *Slash* noted X's performance as pushing them "in one night ... from cult status to front-line contender."

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[16] L.A. *Times*, February 28, 1978, sec. IV.

> Maybe one of the most hardcore bands of the area, they offer the most straightforward no bullshit punk noise I've heard in a while.... X are uncompromising and uneasy listening, routine they are not. The punks know. Too bad for the others.[17]

The review, published a couple of months after the show, seemed to directly address Hilburn. And later in the same issue, a review of X the following week in a show at the Whisky-a-Go-Go:

> X have become one of the most exciting groups around in a matter of weeks, and if this show is any indication they're soon going to leave everyone else way behind. To watch John Doe screaming his song into the mike, all contorted with passion while Exene is shaking in trance behind and Billy Zoom is grinning insanely while hitting his guitar; to watch Exene and John trading vocals while the music literally sizzles and burns right thru (sic) you is something you're not about to forget. The intensity and originality of their tunes is amazing.[18]

X's music appealed to a wider spectrum of the L.A. experience than the art-initiated, giving voice to the rootlessness of postmodern life, and particularly of car-mad L.A. X's sound and lyrics, and punk more generally in Los Angeles, reflected its locale.

As Mullen proclaimed, local punk was "a spectacle of simulated London street desperation in the promised land filtered through a rock and roll sensibility of carbonated freeway fury and terminal swimming pool despair..."[19] Mixing the Situationalist-inspired antics of London punks with the noir vision of Los Angeles that Mike Davis describes in *City of Quartz*, young people created a punk rock specifically suited for the cultural and social environment of Los Angeles -- and this vision was enticing to many people across the landscape, not just those who looked to rock or art for their identity.

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[17] *Slash*, Volume 1, Number 9, (April 1978), 18.

[18] *Slash*, Volume One, Number 9, (April 1978), 24.

Combining fragments of local depictions produced by the likes of Raymond Chandler, Joan Didion, Charles Bukowski, Nathanael West, and Kenneth Anger, with older, urban, European, bohemian influences like Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire, the first L.A. punks attempted to erase their pasts, constructing themselves anew in the manner of previous urban youth subcultures. Where they originally came from was unimportant, as they rechristened themselves and created a new vision of their city and their world, rejecting the sunshine and surf. Even as they had come to L.A. from the East Coast to find something to do, John Doe and Exene of X sang, "She had to leave Los Angeles/She had started to hate every nigger and jew/every mexican who gave her a lot of shit/every homosexual and the idle rich."

In response to this vision, more and more of "the curious and the strange" of L.A. were finding their way to punk, and L.A. punk was representing a greater range of perspectives. At the Elk's Lodge benefit there was still room for the day-glo and trash bag aesthetic of the Weirdos and the Screamers, there was still a place for the licorice whips and peanut butter and body slashing of the Germs, but the artistic focus was expanding. Though the punk rock performed at the Elks Lodge shows did sound different from anything traditional rock critics were used to, it was sounding good to more and more people. The aesthetics of distinction still marked a line between subculture and dominant culture, but as more people came in contact with the subculture they began to hear what the early punks heard, even if the critics still did not.

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[19] *Slash*, Vol 1, No. 6, (December 1977), 30; cited in Gene Sculatti, "Everybody Needs Somebody to Hate," *Creem* (October 1981), 22.

As the music changed, so did the composition of the crowd listening to it. If the *Times* was curious enough to send two critics, so too were hundreds of others from the greater Los Angeles area. As the *Slash* reporter's notes described it,

> Many new faces, the legions are growing (on weekends anyway). Healthy high school girlies very self-consciously safety-pinned from head to toe. In the back of the main room there is hair everywhere on the floor. Someone got clipped right on the spot. A case of instant conversion, I guess.[20]

Slash writers expressed ambivalence about whether this newcomer should be welcomed into the fold. The L.A. scene had provided sanctuary to misfits like Alice Armendariz, allowing her to find an identity as Alice Bag. In many ways, the scene provided a surrogate family; as one punk recalled, "I'd fall into this group of pogoers, and they would pick me up immediately. It was a group of fifty kids and they were very nice and gentle."[21] At the same time, as *Times'* critic Kristine McKenna remarked, "I went to shows for two years and no one would say a word to me."[22] The Elks Lodge shows were instrumental in introducing and converting, if not the masses, and if not yet the *Times'* critics, more and more bored teenagers and twenty-somethings. "The punks's livid music, raging lyrics, and ragtag fashions would not -- could not -- be ignored henceforth," the journalist Chris Morris wrote. [E]ver-growing numbers of the curious and the strange were being pulled into the music's blaring maelstrom."[23]

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[20] *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 9, (April 1978), 18.

In fact, the Elks Lodge shows caught the L.A. scene in a pivotal moment of its history, and throughout the year the main topics of debate in the letters pages of *Slash* would be the elitist attitudes of the Hollywood punk insiders, and by extension, the meaning of punk -- two questions inextricably linked in the search for subcultural capital.

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[21] Philomena Winstanley, "Interview with Claude Bessy," *Maximum Rocknroll* [S.F.] No. 127, (December 1993), n.p.

[22] Quoted in Jeff Spurrier, "Los Angeles Punk Rock," *Details*, (December 1994), 120.

[23] Chris Morris, *Beyond and Back: The Story of X* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1983), 22.

"the new punk testament"

Slash defended both elitism and openness, reflecting its ambivalence about youth culture and mass culture. It set itself up as the voice of punk, promoting the "New Punk Testament," but a big part of its definition included debate over its meaning, debate while often scandalous and slanderous, open nonetheless. Bessy readily published letters attacking him and Mullen and other insiders, and then gave his pen free reign in responding with wit, fury and a raging vocabulary. As Kickboy Face, Bessy denied the elitism of L.A. punk, responding to a letter in May 1978: "...that 'clique' you mention is actually 5 or 6 cliques, each one more 'punk' than the other one, all of them wasting their time and energy at their silly games. You could start one yourself (all you need is 5 to 10 really bored people) and feel on top of things!"[24] -- an easy enough claim for him to make, as he already had his turf staked out, but also partly true.

Within the pages of the zine, Kickboy Face always won the arguments, as he was the best writer and always had the last word. But clearly there were many voices within the punk scene that would not be cowed into submission by his vitriol. And as new people came into the scene from throughout the postsuburban region they continued to redefine punk according to their desires. And so they debated the meaning of punk. Should power pop be included? Should punks hate the rich? Were L.A. punks holier than thou? Were safety pins currently out of vogue? And always the problem of hair, hair, hair.

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[24] *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (May 1978), 6.

Many of the people who participated in the punk scene may not have called themselves punks, but they kept coming back to the shows, they kept reading the zines and listening to the records. Punk was the only thing going on at the time, and it made sense -- maybe not all of it, but enough to draw those looking for something to do. Photos from the period attest to the variety of dress at punk shows, especially with regard to hair, providing evidence of the openness of the Hollywood punk scene. "Committed" punks may have called the guys with long hair "poseurs" or "weekend punks," but, in fact, punk identity remained in flux. Most who were attracted to punk were not sure what it was, and while they knew that long hair was not punk, that negative knowledge did not give them enough to go on. So you cut your hair -- then what? How to create a positive identity out of punk for so many of these outsiders was either uncertain or uncodified.

The Masque survived long enough, but not too long (closing down for good in early 1979) to immediately become legendary as the place for L.A. punk. But it did not survive long enough to become the only place; and without the Masque there was central performance space, so punks went wherever they could. Thus no person or idea or locale could claim exclusive ownership. Punks and fans had to travel all over the vast sprawl of the L.A. basin in search of venues to perform -- to Hollywood, to downtown, to the San Fernando Valley, to Arcadia, to Camarillo State Mental Hospital -- mirroring what had happened in London (though not New York) where because of punk's notoriety, venues were difficult to find. In L.A., though, the problem was more one of infrastructure; there were not that many clubs available to bands performing original material, and those that did exist were more into the L.A. studio system and committed to the country rock of the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, et al. Live rock'n'roll in L.A. in 1977/78 was hard to come by outside of the arenas.

"a few la-la-la's won't kill you ..."

One contradiction punks faced, or one tension within the punk scene, revolved around the question of how much of previous rock'n'roll should be taken as a model, or at least as part of punk's heritage. Was Elvis a punk? Was Rimbaud? Groucho Marx? Who were the proper ancestors to today's punks in Hollywood?[25] Musically, there was no definition of punk. So some were free to come to punk through their love of rock'n'roll, and to see punk merely as an extension of this tradition. In the first years of punk in L.A. the terms "punk" and "new wave" were used almost interchangeably, especially by critics such as Robert Hilburn, but also by scenesters. A skinny tie and red sharkskin suit was as much a punk outfit as a spiked dog collar and plastic trash bag dress. DJs in clubs played punk, new wave, reggae, anything that sounded different than rock radio, as there was so little punk vinyl to play between sets. Bands like the Go-Gos, Alleycats and Flyboys came up through the LA punk scene and started off rough sounding, but quickly refined their sound -- and not only to make their sound more accessible -- as they improved technically, and paid homage to 50s and 60s pop rock styles. The scene accommodated a great variety of musical styles, most were louder, cruder, maybe faster versions of the basic rock'n'roll sound.

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[25] For examples see *Bomp!* Vol 3. No. 7, Issue 16 (Winter 1976-77), 40-41 and Vol. 4 No. 1, Issue 17 (November 1977).

As the scene grew, "punk" and "new wave" came to signify distinct musical styles, fashions, and ideologies. The names punk and new wave were somewhat interchangeable earlier because the music was indistinguishable; they were not two separate genres. Gradually, the musical definitions hardened. Punk became three-chord rock, hard and uptempo, descended from the Ramones who defined the genre. New Wave became the poppier side of punk, with bouncy rhythms, often tinged with farfisa organ or horns or synthesizer.

By 1978, the pages of *Slash*, and the whole scene, were filled with debates about what constituted true punk music, as well as true punk behavior and politics. One particularly acrimonious debate flared up between Brendan Mullen, proprietor of the Masque, and Greg Shaw, owner of Bomp Records and the record store which had hosted the Damned in April of 1977.

Shaw was an early advocate of punk who participated fully in the scene. He had written a letter to *Slash* praising their first issue. His Bomp records preexisted the punk revolution, emerging out of his fascination with the garage bands of the sixties, a sound which by the mid-seventies had evolved into what was fairly accurately called "power pop." To Shaw, and his fellow record collectors and almost obsessive aficionados, punk rock fit nicely into the path he had been following for a decade. But to other punks, more newly arrived into underground music fandom and business, the music and the man were suspect, too retrograde, too "new wave," not "punk" enough.

In early 1978 Brendan Mullen and others viciously slammed Shaw in letters to *Slash* after an interview with Shaw had been published in the January issue.[26] One letter writer called power pop "adolescent, high-pitched whine coated with sugar" and "moronic schmaltz."[27] Mullen wrote,

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[26] *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 7, (January 1978), 20.

[27] El-Tot sira, letter to *Slash*, Vol. 1 No. 8, (February 1978), 10.

"Powerpop is ***not*** the only logical progression of 'punk rock' to more tonal and melodic adaptedness. It's only a cop-out from a consciousness which could eventually create something different...."[26]

Shaw responded by first claiming credit for his own role in laying the basis for punk:

> ...I've loved good rock & roll all my life. I was buying records by Elvis and Chuck Berry when I was 6, I was disgusted when the music died in the early 60's, I lived through the years of pop mania in the '60s and at all times my life was dedicated to finding or helping create more of the highest quality rock & roll music. After all that, I had to live thru the years of James Taylor and John Denver, and I don't think there would be any punk scene today if people like me, during those years, hadn't invented fanzines, underground records, etc., and promoted awareness of the 60s punk groups that were the direct inspiration of all of today's SLASH idols.[29]

Shaw also pleaded for tolerance, for an inclusiveness within punk for a variety of musical forms:

> Enough already with posing and posturing and rhetoric and fucking dialectical dogma. We all just wanna have some fun, and we're in this together to make the scene happen. As long as the music is coming from the people and relates honestly to its audience, it's New Wave and that's all I'm interested in promoting or protecting.
> 'A few la-la-la's won't kill you . . . '

The fight between power pop and punk was ironic because power pop was the acknowledged local musical forebear of

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[26] Brendan Mullen, letter to *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 10, (May 1978), 6.

[29] Shaw had written in his earlier letter to Slash: "It was me or Mark [Shipper} who actually coined the phrase 'punk rock." Did you know that? In 1971!" *Slash*, Vol 1, No. 2 (June 1977), n.p.

L.A. punk, with bands like the Motels, the Pop!, and the Last displaying the only signs of live musical vitality in the days before punk emerged in L.A.[30] And, in fact, Shaw was not arguing that power pop should replace punk, nor that it truly was punk, only that it should be allowed to exist alongside punk, as the commercial alternative to a punk music which "should remain underground if it is to remain pure." Punk "could survive indefinitely, as the conscience of rock & roll and as an experimental medium" while power pop could take over the airwaves so that at least the people for whom punk was too negative or inaccessible would be able to hear good music. Shaw rejected accusations that he promoted power pop for his own commercial objectives, claiming instead, "I *am* obsessed -- as I've always been -- with great music, and there's never enough to satisfy me. I want to see the entire world obsessed with rock & roll mania and all its cultural byproducts...."[31]

Therein lay the problem, however. As more of the world took notice of punk, more of the older punks wanted everyone else to go away. Kickboy Face still rejected the idea that punk should be a "secret club," arguing, "If our sound stays a cult matter it's going to die and life will once again be a very sad ordeal."[32] But after this debate it became clear that punk had to be redefined more explicitly. Shaw showed his sixties' roots in his faith that the softer side of punk rock, not the "ugly, negative and violent" side, could provide the basis for a "lasting youth culture and a musical genre that will reach and change the lives of millions."

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[30] See Pooch, "Rocking before the Masque, and L.A. music perspective," *Flipside* 54 (1986), 6.

[31] *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 9, (April 1978), 8.

The creation of a "lasting youth culture" was not, however, the punk revolution most *Slash* writers sought. So they rejected the music of such descendants of the proto-punk popsters as the Last, the Motels and the Quick. And *Slash* and Mullen were quite ambivalent about how much they wanted to "reach and change the lives of millions." They were ambivalent about the possibility and desirability of using punk as a vehicle for the youth culture transformation of mass culture. And Shaw's embracing of the DIY ethic -- which could have qualified him as a punk -- disqualified him in its unabashed advocacy of such "hippie" values as community and youth culture. The debate fractured the scene almost down the middle and extended far beyond the pages of *Slash*.[33]

The question was not only one of musical taste and internecine struggles for subcultural capital. It became inevitably one of money as well. The lure of the new wave was as much a commercial proposition as a musical one. As punk gained a degree of attention and notoriety, nationally after the Sex Pistols' Winterland gig in January of 1978, and locally, after the Elks Lodge shows, not only was the definition of punk potentially up for grabs, with more people involved, but L.A. punk became a potentially viable commodity, one that those whose life and business it was to accumulate profit were starting to notice. A year before Mullen could have tolerated power pop and new wave as loosely defined genres within the general punk revolution, but now they began to represent the corporate product, the softer edge of the revolution, maybe even the reactionary backlash.

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[32] Kickboy Face, response to letter from Richard Humbert, *Slash*, Vol. 1 No. 8, (February 1978), 10; Editorial, Vol. 1, No. 5, (October 1977), 3.

[33] See also Shaw's *Bomp!* #18 (March 1978), "Special Issue!: Power Pop!"

If Shaw can be believed that he was not out to exploit the scene (and I have found no one who has questioned his sincerity)[34], others, like Kim Fowley, who staged a series of "New Wave Nights" at the Whisky when the term "new wave" still had a broader meaning, were unabashedly in it with the traditional motives of a rock'n'roll promoter. At earlier times, punks could be grateful for the opportunity to perform and see bands, and thus ignore the seedier side of Fowley's personality and ambition. Now he was accused of trying to profit from the scene. Which, of course, he was.[35]

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[34] Although the letter from El-Tot sira did imply that Shaw was one of those "capitalistic, money-grabbing entrepreneurs riding the coattails of punk."

Another figure, perhaps even more emblematic of the difficulty of discovering the lines between punk and new wave, between art and commerce, between the revolutionary and the reactionary was Rodney Bingenheimer. After closing the doors in 1975 on Rodney's English Disco, he began a radio show on KROQ on August 16, 1976, playing at first mostly New York bands and imports, the only place on LA radio to find the Ramones and the Sex Pistols. As he claimed in early 1978, "I sort of started this scene 'cos who was doing this a year and a half ago? Nobody else was. I was on the radio." But maybe because of his too-glam, rooster hair cut, or for his tendency to hang out in the corner booth of the Whisky -- where he occasionally booked acts -- with the most glamorous of rockers and wanna-be models; maybe because his show, though relegated to just two hours on Sunday nights, was broadcast over a mainstream (if small) rock station; or maybe because he had the show, he was perceived to have power -- for whatever reasons, Rodney was as much vilified as celebrated throughout the scene. He was accused simultaneously of ignoring LA bands and of raking in the dough from LA punk. He denied the charges continually, arguing, "So, what do these kids want from me? I'm doing the best I can do, it's only two hours. They say

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[35] See Barney Hoskyns, *Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes and the Sound of Los Angeles* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996).

I should play L.A. bands -- they don't have records, how do you play invisible records? The L.A. bands that do have records, they should turn 'em up or something in the studio."[36] And he was not paid for the privilege of taking to the airwaves once a week. But some resented Rodney's attitude and "power," as the Angry Samoans expressed in "Get Off the Air":

> He can't read baby he can't talk
> He's L.A.'s favorite punk rock jock
> Glitter bands and Bowie's cock
> Are his ideas of new wave rock ...
>
> Get off the air, get off the air
> You pathetic male groupie, you don't impress me
> Get off the air, you fuckin' square
> You're just a jerk as far as I can see.[37]

The musical question of the distinction between punk and new wave (of which power pop could be seen as a subset) became important in 1978 as it had not been before, because more of the world was taking notice. It was inevitably a commercial question. By mid-1979 the Dickies were the only L.A. punk band to have signed a contract with a major label, but the Dickies' music, though certainly loud and fast, was upbeat and humorous. In the context of the music of the period, their sound was truly radical -- they were possibly the fastest band on the planet -- but politically they could be seen as tame. The joke was too arch, too goofy, so that their cover versions of Black Sabbath's "Paranoia" and Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction," which could have dark messages, blended smoothly and humorously with their renditions of Boyce and Hart's "She" and the Banana Splits theme song. This is not to say they were "new wave" and not "punk," but that of all the L.A. punk bands, this was the one that A&M Records could take a chance on (a wager which never paid off in the States).

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[36] *Slash*, Vol. 1, No. 9, (April 1978), 20.

[37] M. Saunders, T. Homer, G. Turner, "Get Off the Air," Haizman Music, BMI (1980), on The Angry Samoans, *Inside My Brain*.

the scene

A number of things were going on with these conflicts, these tensions within the scene. First of all, the "scene" turned out to be amorphous and uncontainable. It could be defined at any given moment, but the definition would stick only for that moment, and only for the interested parties. Shaw and Bingenheimer -- and anyone who ever showed up on the scene -- were scrutinized for their punk credentials. Was punk something completely new, something no one outside could possibly understand? Or was it the latest in a long line of artistic or teenage or even political rebellions? Elders like Shaw, Fowley and Bingenheimer were suspect, corrupted by their attachment to music life before punk. In Hollywood the scene had some connections to the past, especially through the elders. The Whisky had housed many of L.A.'s best sixties' bands. Many of the twenty-something scenesters and attendees not only had had long hair, but may have had some actual memories of the sixties and hippie/counterculture/new left/situationist philosophies. These memories, these histories, are what accounted for much of the more overtly political content, such as it existed in early L.A. punk. But these sixties, these histories were distrusted by newer and younger punks, for whom the past had no resonance whatsoever.

A fragmentation of definition, and a hardening of lines, occurred at the moment when other voices emerged to stake a claim on punk. If Shaw's definition ultimately lost out, drowned by the more vitriolic and splenetic pens of Bessy and Mullen, Shaw did not disappear. His vision would be attractive to others, he would continue to reach them through his Bomp Records, and, importantly, he would provide a model of how to survive outside not only the mainstream music business, but also the hip Hollywood scene. Similarly, Bingenheimer would never be ostracized from the Hollywood clique, but he became less relevant, less "punk," except for one important thing: his radio show was the main way kids outside of Hollywood, outside of fashionable circles, and maybe even outside of the radius of an easy Saturday night jaunt to Sunset Blvd, heard the latest of local and international punk. His show brought punk rock music to the *real* outsiders -- pimply-faced geeks in the outlying areas who had lacked a scene to attach themselves to.

Part of the problem was with the contested nature of the definition of punk. Particularly, because to be a punk was such a personal decision, involving one's opinion of oneself, as well as of the world, the punk scene would inevitably be split. And as alienation was one of the main reasons for becoming a punk, there was no reason to believe that some would not be alienated *within* the scene, especially given its often cliquish or elitist nature. Further, more and more of the newer punks were younger than most of the first. They encountered punk for the first time not hanging out on the streets of Hollywood or in the clubs, as they were too young and/or unconnected, but by listening to *Rodney on the ROQ* and reading through the back pages of *Creem*, or by watching some media expose. Many discovered punk in isolation, or maybe with a couple of friends, and found that punk could aid them in discovering (or creating) who they were. As more punks came from the ranks of adolescents this establishment of identity through punk took on greater significance, than it had for many of the earliest punks who came to it in their twenties.

While Shaw's plea for tolerance and inclusiveness may have made sense in terms of creating a vital artistic scene around rock'n'roll, punk could no longer be maintained within artistic definitions. The boredom of early L.A. punks, their "art damage," and their antipathy for the music business were being superseded as motivations for punkdom.

New types of boredom and antipathy -- born out of and directed at everyday life in postsuburbia -- created punk rockers.

Not only did these new kids feel welcomed, but they felt emboldened to make punk rock in their own image. Most significantly, many decided to do it themselves, on their own turf. If the whole history of rock'n'roll was to be destroyed, included within that history would be early punk rock if necessary. Meaning, the elders to be destroyed potentially included not only Shaw and Bingenheimer, but also eventually Alice Bag and Darby Crash. This propensity within the short history of punk, or within the longer histories of postwar youth cultures, of youth to refashion their own subcultures after themselves, took on a specific dimension in Los Angeles with punk rock, a property that had everything to do with the specific coordinates of L.A.

Part of why kids in the outer regions could see themselves doing it themselves, without the help of the Hollywood hip had to do with the geography of the area. If you were in Hollywood you were not necessarily at the center of things. With the Masque more closed than open, and the Whiskey and Starwood changing booking policies seemingly every month, there were no steady venues for punk rock in the Hollywood area. Occasional shows were held at the Larchmont Hall, on the edges of Hollywood, but early on punks were going anywhere they could to find places to play, from the San Fernando Valley to Orange County. And with the major label interest in L.A. punk still nonexistent, the Hollywood scene developed little national reputation, little fame to attract others who would reproduce the scene in a faithful fashion. The kids outside of Hollywood could buy the Ramones and Sex Pistols albums and make of it what they would. And they did.

Of course, at the same time as the kids were discovering punk rock, so were the critics and the A&R men.

"anybody wanna fight?"

In June of 1979 the British rocker Graham Parker appeared at the Starwood. Parker was one of the leading imported New Wave acts which had emerged in the wake of punk. In England, Parker, Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, Joe Jackson, the Boomtown Rats and others had taken punk's sneering rebel stance and mixed it with a more accessible, poppier sound. From the beginning of punk there had been an artier and poppier strands, mixing diverse musical influences. The distinction between punk and new wave was more than musical, however, especially in the United States. Whereas in England New Wave constituted a genre of its own, with some of the best post-punk music being produced by Costello, Lowe and others, in the United States the label became simply a sales category by 1979. By then, the new musical movement taking over the British charts, and potentially denting the American ones came from new wave, not punk.

This is why the debate over power pop the previous year had been so important. As the scene expanded -- meaning, as more and more people became interested in coming out to see this new music performed live -- the insiders would lose control over the meaning of punk, and of their own little world. "Subcultural capital" could be retained by demonstrating one's devotion, and one way to prove that was to show that one had been on the scene "since the beginning." But that could not necessarily be demonstrated on a moment's notice, by style or attitude. A more successful way to show commitment was by dressing "punk," in ways that the faint of heart and less devout would not. The same went for the music. Whereas a year of two earlier, almost any strange dress and strange noise could qualify as punk or new wave, by now more precise labels were necessary for explaining the proliferation of new music and fans. The labels were necessary in terms of maintaining a subculture's borders, but they were also helpful for descriptive purposes: punk meant hard. Over the next few years the musical borders would shatter as all sorts of new and old music would be crafted and recombined in bands and clubs all over the area, but the necessity for labeling heightened.

Punks began to reject the new wave label because unlike power pop, for instance, the label was insufficiently descriptive of a musical genre. By 1979-80, new wave was no more than a commercial proposition. The uniform became codified -- straight leg pants, skinny tie, striped shirt, space age sunglasses. As the *Slash* editorial of April 1980 fulminated,

> Fuck the New Wave! ... That's right. It has (not so) suddenly become necessary to draw the line.... Something has gone drastically wrong and they won't get away with it. They have o so conveniently just decided that you and I are simply part of something perfectly legitimate .... We ain't it, we don't buy it, we don't believe it, we don't identify with it, we don't dance to it and we don't like you....[38]

Whereas earlier the struggle had been internecine, played out in, among other places, the pages of *Slash*, now the enemy was "they," record company executives in pony tails, newly attired in spandex, "parasitic scum" fishing for the next big thing. Previously L.A. punks hated the music business for its complacency, ignorance and bad taste. Now punks felt their scene was being invaded.

New Wave was potentially the next big thing by 1980. The discovery of something new was especially important for the record industry after the "Crash of 1979" when gross sales dropped for the first time since 1970.[39] In Los Angeles, the physical center of the pop record business, there was a musical "renaissance," with clubs sprouting all over to cater to the growing audience for new music. The increase in live venues signaled a musical revival growing out of the punk/new wave scene. On the heels of the chart success of new wave in England, and the mild success of New Yorkers' Blondie and Patti Smith, record company executives began to scout the L.A. clubs looking for bands to sign. Then the Knack -- the "ultimate 'skinny tie' band," power pop without the power -- hit it huge in 1979 with their debut album *Get the Knack* and single "My Sharona."[42] The major labels descended, signing 30 bands in the next year and a half after the success of the Knack. The L.A. *Times* began to highlight the local scene, no longer deferring to New York or resting solely on the achievements of the Laurel Canyon country-folk rockers.[43] Even Doug Weston, whose famous folk club the Troubadour had been previously trashed by punks, wanted in on the act and began booking some of the safer new wave acts. While older punk-derived bands like X, the Alley Cats and the Plugz received mild interest from the industry, most of the attention was aimed at power-poppers like 20/20, the Quick, and the Plimsouls. Not all of these bands were awful, and not all were band wagon jumpers. A band like the Motels, signed to A&M, had been slogging it out for longer than any of the punk bands on the scene. But after the success of the Knack, the record companies were looking for immediate returns on their investments, and only one of the L.A. bands signed at the time -- the Go-Gos, who had developed a poppy, girl-group sound -- managed to make anything like a career in the majors. The rest of the bands were unceremoniously dumped, each in their turn, as they failed at being "the next big thing."

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[38] *Slash*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (April 1980), 5.

[39] Marc Eliot, *Rockonomics: The Money Behind the Music* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1989), 187.

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[42] Hoskyns, 297.

[43] See L.A. *Times* series on "L.A.'s Rock Renaissance" (June-August 1980) covering almost exclusively the poppier new wave acts; see also *Record Review*, Vol. 3 No. 5 (October 1979); Vol. 3 No. 6 (December 1979); Vol. 4 No. 1 (February 1980); Vol. 4 No. 2 (April 1980); Vol. 4 No. 3 (June 1980). And see Chris Morris, "L.A.'s Rock & Roll Renaissance," *Rolling Stone* 321 (July 10, 1980), 12-14 which focusses on the new wave bands but mentions how the major labels ignore punk bands like the Plugz, the Germs and X.

On the same night as Graham Parker was playing the Starwood, the English punk band the Damned returned to L.A. for a couple of shows at the Whiskey. They carried on their typical theatrical, scrambling, thrashing set, as Dave Vanian, dressed in white face make-up and dracula cape lurched around the stage and climbed the rafters. At the end of their first set of the night, Rat Scabies came out from behind his drum kit to taunt the L.A. punk aesthetes. "Anybody wanna fight?!" he shouted from the stage in his cockney snarl to the Hollywood day-glo set assembled below. Up onto the stage leapt a kid dressed in flannel shirt, combat fatigues, buzzed head, and army boots. The kid looked like no other punk in the place -- no more than fifteen years old, easily the youngest person in the club. The kid was from Hermosa Beach, an hour and a half away from the Whiskey-a-Go-Go. Rat Scabies gave the kid a sound thrashing before the bouncers intervened to eject the troublemaker. Before the second set, however, the young punk sneaked in the back door, and was back on the "dance floor" bouncing around into people in a manner a bit rougher than the Whiskey denizens were accustomed to.[42] The kid signalled another transformation within punk, a change fostered by the particular landscape of postsuburban Southern California.

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[42] To conclude the second set, Rat Scabies hit someone else in the audience over the head with a guitar.

Chapter Five: "Damaged": Hardcore Punk, Consumerism and the Family

Penelope Spheeris's documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization,* filmed between December 1979 and May 1980, caught the Southern California punk scene at a transitional moment. Interviews and live footage from older Hollywood-based punk bands like X, the Bags and the Germs were mixed with the postsuburban bands Black Flag and the Circle Jerks. Much of the crowd in the film, at least those filmed in the "pit," the area immediately in front of the stage where the "slam-dancing" occurred, consisted of the newer, buzz-headed hardcore punks. The film made no mention of the fragmentation within the scene, but the soundtrack album cover photo was prophetic.

On the cover was a photo of the head of Darby Crash, lead singer of the Germs, lying down face up on the stage, looking dead. Makeup on his face drips, like blood, as his hand clutches the microphone. An iron cross dangles from a locked chain around his neck. Darby Crash was one of the original Hollywood punks. Born Jan Paul Beahm, he was a teenage glam and Bowie freak who dove into punk when the British punk band the Damned came to town in April 1977, changing his name to Bobby Pyn and his band's name from Sophistifuck and the Revlon Spam Queens to the Germs. Later calling himself Darby Crash, he became the biggest "star" on the Hollywood scene with an almost hypnotic control over his fans and followers. As one punk remembered, "He was a cult leader in every sense of the word," with a "bizarre magnetic power" over people.[1] His signature line, "Hey gimme a beer," was most often complied with, and followers burned cigarettes into their own and others' arms -- the "Germs burn." He was the archetype of the L.A. punk, the most influential singer for the new breed of hardcore punk, and already a local legend.

In the summer of 1980 Darby took off for England to check out the scene, and ended up hanging out with Adam Ant, the latest project of Malcolm Maclaren, Sex Pistols svengali. Darby returned to L.A. with feathers and a mohawk hair cut to go with his leather and chains, an adaptation of the current "antmusic" fad wardrobe from London to the local hardcore look, spawning a sweeping readjustment of the local punk fashion. But the Germs broke up, and Darby was trying to put together his own band, managing one show. Having been threatening to kill himself for so many years, he was not believed when he once again made the threat after the show by the Darby Crash Band at the Starwood. He felt he had lost his leadership within the L.A. scene. Even though he was still influential to the younger and newer punks, he and his music were surpassed as punk became even louder, harder, tougher even than the Germs' sound. On December

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[1] Geza X, liner notes to Germs, *Rock N' Rule: Live at the Masque Reunion Christmas 1979* (XES Records, 1986).

7th, 1980 Darby O.D.'d on heroin under a handwritten sign on the wall proclaiming "Here lies Darby Crash" and an arrow pointed down.

from "art-damaged" to "damaged"

Postsuburban punk arose both in descent from and in opposition to local musical developments and in response to local social and political conditions. Down the coast from Hollywood, in Hermosa Beach and Huntington Beach, punk was being reborn, punk with a new face, ready to fight at a moment's notice. From the very beginning of the Hollywood scene, punks, such as the bands F-Word and the Dickies, had been coming in from all over the area, but they had tried to identify themselves as part of the scene. But even then there were some who preferred to maintain an outsider status, coming in to Hollywood for the shows, but retreating to their homes in the outer areas. The zine *Flipside* was started by five recent Whittier High School graduates in May 1977, hitting the streets just weeks after *Slash*'s debut -- 100 copies of a 20 page xerox zine sold at shows for a quarter. Pooch, one of the founders, remembered that they liked to return to their hometown of Whittier after the shows and make fun of the Hollywood punks.[2] And as early as 1978 a couple of singles had been recorded, produced and distributed by exurban punks on homegrown record labels.

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[2] Interview with Pooch, January 10, 1995.

Black Flag (from Hermosa) released their "Nervous Breakdown" 7" on their own SST label in the middle of the year, followed by "Out of Vogue" by Santa Ana/Fullerton's Middle Class on Billy Star's Joke Records. The different experiences of these two bands, and compared with an emerging scene out of the high schools further south, is instructive about what was happening within the punk scene. At least three different ways of approaching the Hollywood scene developed, reflecting a new taxonomy of tastes within the subfield of hardcore punk rock, and all of them ultimately rejected the urban hipsterism of the Hollywood scene.

The Middle Class, three brothers (ages 15, 17 and 21) and a friend from Santa Ana and Fullerton down in Orange County, had ventured the two hours drive into the Hollywood scene as early as early-1978 when they went to Brendan Mullen for a gig at the Masque and almost got laughed back home. "Having been advised to cut their hair and punk-out their dress, they were summarily dismissed to the suburbs, presumably to pass into a well-deserved obscurity," one zine writer observed. "However, fate intervened in the form of Hector of the Zeros who booked them as opening support for a show featuring the Controllers and the Germs and, after that, for the next six months, they played support to many of the local Hollywood scene bands...."[3] After their first show at Larchmont Hall in April, where the crowd "stood in a semicircle and nobody moved" they gigged regularly as the token "suburban" band.[4] *Slash* referred to their first show in a column titled, "The 'Hey, You Mean They Got Punks in Those Places??' Dept." Noting the blasé reaction and blank stares the Middle Class received, *Slash* commented, "sometimes them scene-making punx are worse than the fuckin' Spanish Inquisition!" and asked the prescient question, "Will the next New Wave come from the great Wasteland?"[5] (This at a time when the term "new wave" had not yet been rejected.)

The Hollywood scene accepted the Middle Class, at least in part. But even when some of their members moved into the Canterbury, they did not lose their identity as a "suburban" band and the Masque/*Slash* crowd did not quite know what to do with them. Taking the stage looking "like a bunch of rampaging Scientologists," they defied all fashion and music conventions even at a moment when conventions were not so rigidly set within the punk scene. By the summer of 1978, they were making converts, as this *Slash* review attests:

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[3] Ray Cook, "Middle Class," *Damage* [S.F.] 12/13 (June 1981), 56.

[4] "Middle Class [interview by Howard Etc.]," *Forget It!* [San Jose] No. 6 (ca. 1980), 5. In Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, eds., *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1983), Craig Lee identifies the date as August 1978, but his dates are not reliable, 30.

[5] *Slash* [L.A.] Vol. 1, No. 11 (July 1978), 28.

> These guys looked normal. Like high school normal. Like chemistry class normal. Like writing a paper in the library normal. How come they sounded like twisted metal air raids and dynamite fumes? I was shocked. If you look like that, you're not supposed to sound like that. Yet it was obvious: the mob was pogoing with genuine furor, the aggression meter was in the red zone, this was certified punk fever grade triple-A beware of imitations. I've seen fast bands but these unknowns run with the best. And that curly-haired singer should, according to the basic laws of physics, end up with his vocal chords tied in a knot after 5 minutes.[6]

Another *Slash* reviewer the following month wrote:

> [T]heir gigs are more often than not intense, teeth-gritting affairs that leave the participant dazed, stunned, even irritated. The incitable nature of their strange, assaulting music coupled with the growing number of their unpredictably rabid fans result in chaos and confusion. And it keeps getting more and *more* frantic, those affected bashing harder and faster as the set crushes on. The effect is not unlike kissing a semi at full speed.[7]

The Middle Class never brought a scene -- a crowd of fans and followers -- with them to Hollywood, but they never completely left their postsuburban home, either. Like traditional bohemians, and like other L.A. punks, they made the trip into the city to enact their art. But they did not reinvent themselves completely in the process. They didn't change their names, they didn't change their dress. The cover of their first 7" single -- "Out of Vogue", a diatribe against mass culture -- depicts a mundane Southern California suburban scene: two young girls stand in the middle of a street, surrounded and almost dwarfed by the still life of a housing tract with Big Wheels, a basketball backboard, and a VW bus in a driveway. The cover portrayed the scene not only of their roots, but of their continuing daily reality as "The Middle Class," and they would return to these images throughout their career.[6] The Middle Class, as a postsuburban band, redefined the aesthetics of punk, musically and visually, and shifted its terrain of applicability.

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[6] *Slash* Vol, 1, No. 11 (July 1978), 25; review of *Lobotomy* night at the Whiskey. No author is cited for this review, but parts are excerpted in the liner notes to the Middle Class collection *a blueprint for joy 1978-1980* and attributed to David Wiley. See also, *Slash* Vol. 2 No. 1, (Sept 1978), 18; review of Canterbury Night at the Rock Corporation.

[7] *Slash* Vol. 2 No. 1, (Sept 1978), 19; review of Dickies/Middle Class at the Whisky, August 12, 1978.

A similar aesthetic shift occurred at the same time in Hermosa Beach with the formation of Black Flag. The band's long-time engineer Spot describes Black Flag's early sound during his brief stint as the band's bass player:

> Greg invited me to play bass with them and I accepted. Sure, it's something to do. The band rehearsed deep within the bowels of the Hermosa Bath House. So one night I walked down to the Strand, banged on the door and went in. Greg gave me this funky cheapo bass guitar and I plugged it in. He picked up his guitar and started playing loud distorted atonal riffs and I cringed and wondered what I was doing in this dank decrepit dungeon with these strange cretins. The band had a total of six songs, each of which lasted no more than one minute. Greg showed me the simple repetitive chords -- "Ok, do you want to try it?"

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[6] Middle Class, "Out of Vogue" p. & c. 1978 on Joke Records, "Out of Vogue/You Belong/Situations/Insurgence" by The Middle Class. For more on the Middle Class as in between the Hollywood and beach scenes, see "Middle Class [interview by Howard Etc.]," *Forget It!*, 5-11.

> Sure, why not. "Ok, here we go. 1-2-3-4!! and BANG!! the drummer started smashing out a fast trashy straight 4 pattern and the wiry little singer started bellowing and jumping around wildly and Greg's body lurched forward as he underwent a remarkable transition from Jeckyl to Hyde. His head shook, eyes flashed and teeth bared maniacally as he began to grind thick chords out of a guitar that in the shadowy light could have been mistaken for a chainsaw. Within seconds it was over. Jeckyl calmly stepped out of his Hyde as if stepping out of a routine nightmare.
>
> "You want to try it again?" "Uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, well uh, yeah...." I was dumbfounded, shocked, my eyes wide in amazement, my mouth hanging open in disbelief. We played again. 1-2-3-4!! Jeckyl became Hyde. Music became Noise. Punk rock became a resident of Hermosa Beach.
>
> Ten minutes later we had played the entire six song set twice.[5]

As with the Middle Class, punk rock was being musically reborn in the communities outside of Los Angeles, challenging the subcultural boundaries as well.

More by design than by accident, Black Flag never became a part of the Hollywood scene. Unlike F-Word, which came in from Acadia, or the Middle Class or the boys from *Flipside* in Whittier, Black Flag was almost completely divorced from the central L.A. punk scene. Despite talk of recording for Chris D.'s Hollywood-based Upsetter label or Greg Shaw's Bomp Records, ultimately Black Flag had to produce and distribute its own vinyl, starting their SST Records in the process. The band felt ostracized from the Hollywood scene. Ginn complained, "We couldn't get gigs, because we were from outside of the established scene. We just rehearsed for two years." Chuck Dukowski, Black Flag's bass player, explained the band's exclusion from the Hollywood scene:

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[5] Spot, liner notes to *Everything Went Black*.

> In Hollywood, everybody's in the middle of the city, and if you're not from Hollywood, you're not a city person, and you're not urban, you're not tough, you're not a punk. They look at us, we dress like we do, we're from the beach area, and they just kinda go, "SURE you want a gig. Right. Fuck off.[10]

But Black Flag also cultivated the outsider stance, rejecting what they saw as "the overly-glittered rock'n'roll world of Hollywood."[11] As the original lead singer Keith Morris claimed when asked why they didn't just move to Hollywood, "We hate Hollywood! That's the big scene out there. Fuck that scene..." Another punk chimed in, "90% of punk-rockers in L.A. are just old Bowie freaks."[12] Punk rock was redefined as anti-urban, anti-decadence, anti-"art" -- as "hardcore." *Flipside* compared the scene at the Church to the earlier days of Masque, calling the Church "more underground" and claiming, "The kids that live here are also very different than the early Masque crowd, there's no art damage, no rich kid poseurs and no money hungry jerks."[13] From the very beginning, postsuburban punk was redefined in opposition to "art damage," creating idea of punk rock purity -- "hardcore" -- which took root as an antidote to new wave "posing." "Art-damaged" was replaced by "Damaged" -- the title of Black Flag's first album.

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[10] Tim Tonooka, "Black Flag [interview], *Ripper* [San Jose] No. 3 (ca. 1980), 15.

[11] Spot, liner notes to *Everything Went Black*.

[12] *Slash* Vol 2, No. 10 (Nov 1979), 14.

[13] "The Church," *Flipside* [Whittier] 17 (Dec 1979), n.p.

Meanwhile, even further down the coast another scene was beginning to develop around a few bands playing out of high schools in Long Beach and Huntington Beach. Rhino 39, out of Millikin High School in L.B., began making the trip up to Hollywood in 1978. In H.B., the Crowd (from Edison High), the Klan, Vicious Circle, the Skrews, the Slashers and the Outsiders began playing backyard parties. Most of the bands were made up of high school kids who had made the decision to no longer be a jock, a hippie, a surfer, or whatever, and become a punk. In late 1978, into 1979 the transformations were being made all down the coast, first by a few, then by more and more. For the most part, this punk scene developed with very little connection to the earlier Masque-centered one.

New punk bands emerged in droves, and if many of them merely played the 1-2-3-4 sound of the Ramones as fast as they could, others introduced interesting variations on punk, combining diverse influences and sounds. Over the next couple of years bands from around the South Bay and inland Orange County came to play parties in H.B., new bands like the Circle Jerks, Red Cross, the Adolescents, Agent Orange, Social Distortion, in addition to the Middle Class and Black Flag. Eventually a couple of key clubs began to book hardcore punk shows in postsuburbia, the Cuckoo's Nest in Costa Mesa and the Fleetwood in Redondo Beach. Several factions emerged within the scene south of L.A. The day-glo surf set, the leather and chains crowd, the inland punks, and so on. By 1980, residential communities all over the southland held one or two or more punks. What united them all was that they stayed in their postsuburban towns, many because they lived at home (attending high school or junior high), but not all. Even those who seemingly had nothing to keep them there -- runaways and "grown-ups" -- stayed and developed punk rock scenes. Eddie, of Eddie and the Subtitles claimed that, "Orange County is an unbelievable, mindless, sexless, funless monster that should be permanently shut down," but he didn't leave; he stayed, performing and recording with his own bands, producing and managing others, fostering a scene in the Fullerton/Anaheim area.[14]

The aesthetics of the new hardcore punk were defined only in part by the sound of the music -- as much of it was Ramones-derived, Germs-inspired, with a hint of sixties' guitar-tinged, bouncy beach rock -- but more by the style of dress and behavior. The main musical innovation was to make punk rock faster, noisier if possible -- in a word, worse. As punk writer Joe Carducci writes, "There has always been a surplus of lousy 'rock' bands, but hardcore was perhaps the first time on the planet that there was a fad for them."[15] There *was* musical innovation, experimentation, even sounds that expanded rock'n'roll's horizons -- and Black Flag's Greg Ginn was listed as one of the 1980s ten most influential guitarists by *Musician* magazine -- but the DIY ethos combined with the hardcore punk aesthetic to produce some barely listenable "music" -- a survival and adaptation of Greg Shaw's vision. First of all, DIY meant that musical talent and proficiency were not requirements. And the way most punk shows were structured, with five or more bands sharing the bill, meant that opening slots were often reserved for new bands that were just learning their chops.

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[14] *Slash* Vol 2, No. 10 (Nov 1979), 13.

The localism of hardcore emphasized punk's exclusivity, and a valuable way to keep out the uncommitted was to make music that only the committed could tolerate or appreciate. This became especially important after the emergence of new wave as the commercial alternative to punk. Hardcore punks aimed their most vicious assaults on new wave "poseurs," those who thought punk was a "fun" way to dress up on a saturday night. It took well-trained ears to distinguish between the sounds of Modern Warfare and RF7, or even between the individual songs of any given band. And it took true commitment to suffer through a half dozen or more such soundalike bands in a row -- especially when fights were breaking out all around you. Finally, contrary to the Adolescents' admonition, "We're not the background to your stupid fights," hardcore bands often did serve as such a background. Violence --the topic of the next chapter -- was as much aesthetic as political.

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[15] Joe Carducci, *Rock and the Pop Narcotic: Testament for the Electric Church* (Los Angeles: 2.13.61, rev. ed. 1994), 369.

Hollywood punks began to notice the transformation from punk to hardcore in 1979, with a mixture of reactions. When British punks the Buzzcocks came to town, the beach punks made their presence known, storming the stage, dancing the "H.B. strut" -- elbows high, arms and legs flailing, moving backward into other punks -- and diving into the audience. Importantly, the show was held at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, a definitely non-punk venue holding several thousand people, signaling punk's burgeoning popularity.

The postsuburban punks claimed the scene as theirs by their behavior, drawing the lines of distinction not only around the sound of the music, but by the type of proper punk behavior. The security guards, having never seen this type of behavior, started throwing punks off the stage, as waves of others climbed up and took their place. The *Slash* reviewers embraced the "kids'" behavior for invigorating what was a rather dull performance, but the *Times'* Richard Cromelin complained about the disruptions and the irresponsible behavior of the fans. And at one point during the set, one "bleached blond spikey pinhead" reached the stage, skanked across and shouted "Huntington Beach" into the microphone before being muscled back into the crowd by the security forces. Finally, the Buzzcock's singer invited the kids to sit up on the stage, and hundreds gathered around the band as they ripped into their songs with a new vehemence. A *Slash* reviewer remarked, "This was the real thing, live and anarchistic...."[16]

The beach punks were simultaneously revitalizing punk, and fragmenting it. By the end of 1980, there were simply too many people into punk in the greater LA area for the scene to be contained in a small club like the Masque, split up into a few little snobbish cliques. As audiences become larger, they also became more divided. Musical styles also proliferated, all under the rubric of "punk." New zines like *We Got Power* (Santa Monica), *Outcry* (South Pasadena) and thirteen-year-old Shreader's *Rag in Chains* (Hollywood) emerged from the new breed of punks. Scenes sprouted in places outlying areas Fullerton and the San Fernando Valley, eventually from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Within a couple of years, one writer could claim in the liner notes to a Southern California compilation album that hardcore punk was "digging its way into every suburban high school in the U.S.... Today's Hardcore is the most dominant, the most obvious scene in the American music underground."[17] By this point, in the L.A. area, the Hollywood scene had lost its dominance. Some older punks embraced the refreshing change in the scene. Many burned out, after being in the scene for two or three years. Still others sunk into heroin addiction. Many older punks could not be bothered to make the journey down to places like Costa Mesa and Redondo Beach to see bands -- especially since once they arrived they would be greeted with jeers and fists for being too old and "new wave." Others continued to make music, even gaining a degree of mainstream respectability (the kiss of death for hardcore authenticity); X, for example, was named the band of the year in 1980 by the *Times* in honor of their debut album *Los Angeles* on Slash Records. The Masque (in its second locale) finally closed for good late in 1979. *Slash*, whose editor Kickboy Face attempted to embrace and support the new breed of punks, did not survive the transition from punk to hardcore, publishing its final issue in the summer of 1980. Brendan Mullen came out with a new zine, *Slush*, mixing the older punk with the new hardcore, but couldn't get the financing to maintain it beyond a couple of issues.

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[16] *Slash*, Vol. 2 No. 9 (October 1979), 14.

[17] Bruce Pavitt, (Editor, Sub Pop), liner notes to V/A *American Youth Report*, Invasion Records, a division of Bomp Records, Los Angeles, 1982.

The taxonomy of the field had shifted by 1980. While the Hollywood punk scene continued to produce bands, zines and clubs after 1980, a new field called hardcore had emerged. Punk in Hollywood began as "art-damaged," a subfield within the larger field of new wave, which was a sub-field of rock'n'roll. Punk and new wave came to signify different, and opposing, musical styles and ideologies. Hardcore emerged to restore punk to its "purity" in explicit disavowal of new wave, and in a confused combination of reverence and rejection of art-damaged punk. What is remarkable is that young people in postsuburbia saw within punk rock (which was until then a field ruled by working class and avant garde sensibilities) the possibility to express themselves and their own social experience. They acted as agents to contest and shape the rules of the sub-field of punk rock to their needs. Hardcore punk rock developed in a semi-autonomous manner, according to conflicts and contestations within the field of rock'n'roll and the subfield of punk. But for an understanding of how hardcore developed in the specific ways it did -- we must situate it within the social contexts of postsuburbia and the position of youth in 1970s society.

While earlier punks had wrestled with the leftover ideals of the sixties, hardcore punks rejected them outright. The transition from punk to hardcore, and from the sixties to the eighties, occurred when new punks held out hope for revolution from neither within nor without. The do-it-yourself ethos, for them, provided a retreat from larger social, political and cultural issues. Greg Shaw and the first L.A. punks aimed much of their attack at the music industry and, only by extension, the ethos of consumerism which the industry supported. Hardcore punks inverted the equation, ignoring the music business and attacking consumerism as a social process, but without any explicit political framework or statement. In this, hardcore punks reflected the social conditions of postsuburbia. As Cameron Crowe discovered when he returned to high school in the 1970s, the "fast times at Ridgemont High" really took place at the mall, the quintessential postsuburban site. Six huge shopping centers opened in Orange County in the late 60s and early 70s.[16] These malls both reflected and enhanced the geographically dispersed nature of the area. As well, they helped promote what social critics almost universally see as the dominant value system of Orange County: consumerism.

The formation of alternative institutions such as dozens of record labels, zines, clubs, and communal youth organizations can be read as a modernist response to postmodern consumerism, an attempt to create some sense of reality, maybe even authenticity, certainly control over daily life and the future. Through these institutions punks attempted to create themselves as producers, not consumers, combining a romantic Thoreauvianism and a petit-bourgeois entrepreneurialism with a do-it-yourself anarchism. In this way, the establishment of alternative social, economic and political institutions appear as somewhat traditional attempts at production by punks. Punks set up institutions in opposition to the dominant values of consumerism, attempting to create their own semi-autonomous public sphere.

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[16] "Introduction," Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster eds., *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 17.

Hardcore punks fit well within the youth of postsuburbia that Ralph Larkin chronicled in *Suburban Youth in Cultural Crisis*. In refusal of sixties' youth's idealism and socially oriented thinking, the youth of the seventies embraced a radical individualism which expressed its critique of society -- of *everything* -- on the level of everyday life. What Larkin found uniting all students at Utopia, transcending all their social divisions, was boredom. Dissatisfied with their lives, they yet repressed the impulse to rebel, or even to articulate that dissatisfaction collectively. Instead, they remained bored, masking, in Larkin's words, "a critique of everyday life ranging from getting up in the morning to trust in government. They find everyday existence difficult to tolerate."[19] When punk rock came along as an available discourse, a significant minority of youth in postsuburbia embraced it as the articulation of dissatisfaction, as a means of overcoming boredom. But they refused still to trust in anything larger than the self, to even see punk as a movement. Punks rejected both the dominant culture and anything like a "counterculture." They eschewed both community and citizenship, in any socially defined way, preferring to take refuge in the self, in everyday life. In this hardcore punk resulted from an era of diminished expectations, as both antidote to and reflection of general social ills.

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[19] Ralph Larkin, *Suburban Youth in Cultural Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 145.

hardcore punk and the family in postsuburbia

A scene in the film *Suburbia* (dir. Penelope Spheeris, 1983) captures an important aspect of the hardcore punk scene. The kids of the T.R. (the Rejected) gang, parentless and free, leave the abandoned housing tract which they have turned into a squat and drive around in search of criminal mischief to commit. Cruising the streets of their former homes, the quiet, unpeopled, dim-lit asphalt of housing tracts and planned communities, they seek out a pristine example of the foundation of suburban comfort -- the fresh-grown, newly-laid sod of a tract home's front lawn. Without hesitation, and with only giggles for verbal communication, they pile out of the beat-up sedan, roll up the sod and pile it into the trunk. In drunken punk glee, the kids head off to that other symbol of Southern Californian suburban bliss -- the mall. Marching through the deserted corridors of the mall until they reach the bank of flickering television screens of Radio Shack, they roll out the sod and cuddle up in front of the glowing blue babysitter, as the announcer on the screen discusses how to handle nuclear war as an everyday affair.

Suburbia and Spheeris's earlier documentary about punk in Southern California *The Decline of Western Civilization* contributed to a discourse of punk that increasingly emphasized and problematized images of family and home. In particular, in her emphasis on the visual landscape of suburbia, the rejection of punks by their families, and their search for alternative homes, Spheeris constructs a narrative that strikingly echoes the discourse hardcore punks created in songs and zines. The film *Suburbia*, in fact, depicts the new landscape of postsuburbia, not the cliched cul-de-sacs and ranch houses the title connotes. The punk kids inhabit, instead, a house in an abandoned development overrun by packs of wild dogs. Their lives revolve around trips in the car from the mall to the strip mall convenience store to the warehouse on the industrial part of town where the punk shows are staged.

In postsuburbia, without a center to the city, or to politics, there remained only one center: the home. Robert Fishman has argued that, "The true center of this new city is not in some downtown business district but in each residential unit. From that central starting point, the members of the household create their own city from the multitude of destinations that are within suitable driving distance."[20] Kenneth Jackson similarly argues that "our lives are now centered inside the house, rather than on the neighborhood or the community."[21] Mike Davis has shown how the destruction of public space has made downtown Los Angeles into "Fortress L.A.," and Jackson claims the trend is followed in postsuburbia which is "returning to the medieval method of building walls and of denying entrance to all but their residents, employees, and visitors."[22] This focus on the home as the center came about more by default than anything else, as there was no other center to the community, the city, society or politics. Ironically, the home as the last remaining hope to fight off the fragmentation of the outer world came about as the world inside the home was itself fragmenting. Hardcore punk institutions were often designed to counter the fragmenting effects of consumerist postsuburbia, where the line between home and outside world, between private and public, was blurred.

Spheeris based her fiction film on real punks and real events, and the movie mirrors many punks' experiences. SST Records, started by the members of Black Flag, arose first out of "The Church," an old church which was the band's rehearsal and living space in Hermosa Beach. After being kicked out of there, the band lived and had office space throughout the southern half of LA county, living usually in various spots in the South Bay, and moving the office from Hermosa to Redondo to Torrance to Hollywood, depending on circumstances. As with the earlier Hollywood punks who lived and partied at the Canterbury Apartments and the Masque, and a few other places like Joan Jett's apartment on San Vicente, or Tomata Du Plenty's haunted "Wilton Hilton" apartment, the later hardcore punks attempted to find alternative homes. The Better Youth Organization (BYO) started after the notorious Elk's Lodge Riot in 1979 "envisioned as a collective, positive voice ... as a reaction against police violence, outside exploitation & a general negative outlook held against the Punk/alternative music scene." The BYO was centered around "Skinhead Manor" -- "a place where kids from all over Southern California met & exchanged ideas."[23] Others, less overtly politically motivated, made crash-pads and party spots of the occasional available punk rocker's apartment. Mike Ness's place in Fullerton, immortalized in the Social Distortion song "Playpen" as well as in the Adolescents' "Kids of the Black

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[20] Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 185. Fishman shows how there were signs of this development in Los Angeles as early as the 1920s, 172.

[21] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 279.

[22] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992), Chapter 4; Jackson, 301.

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[23] Liner notes to "Someone's Gonna Get Their Head To Believe in Something," (Los Angeles: BYO Records, 1992). See also liner notes to "Someone Got Their Head Kicked In!," (Los Angeles: BYO Records, 1982) and *Generation Magazine*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (August 1983).

Hole," became one such spot.[24] The spatial dimension to hardcore punks' institutions in postsuburbia will be dealt with in the next chapter; here it is important to point how the language of home, of place is imbricated in punks' depictions of their activities. These punk spaces can be seen as the development of alternative homes and communities, and can therefore be analyzed in terms of adolescent psychology and questions of the family.

The language of family was deeply ingrained in punk discourse. In "Home is Where We Hide," the Middle Class sang, "Families breed inside four walls/Like they're expected to do/Uphold standards of living/consorts to the myths that they're given." Milo of the Descendents sang "My Dad Sucks" and "Parents -- they're so fucked up/Parents -- why don't they shut up." Kat of Legal Weapon wrote numerous songs about sexually abusive family situations, concluding that "Daddy's gone mad, and momma's out of her head." Wasted Youth sang about a "Problem Child." The Angry Samoans sang "My old man's a fatso/he's got a potbelly for a mouth/My old man's a fatso/but you know he owns this house." The examples of postsuburban punk songs that address family issues are nearly endless. But what they mean is problematic. When, for example Eugene, in *The Decline of Western Civilization*, admits he doesn't know where his parents are, it is tempting see these songs as reflections of social reality, to see punks as the products of "broken homes" or "dysfunctional families." Some were.

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[24] Mike Boehm, "Kids of the Black Hole," Los Angeles *Times*, July 23, 1989, Calendar Section.

This is the impression given by the films *Suburbia* and *Repo Man* (dir. Alex Cox, 1984). Milo's parents in *Repo Man* are zombies who sit in front of the television watching, and giving all their money to, the tv preacher. In *Suburbia* the parents are divorced, alcoholic, or sexually abusive (leading to a punk girl's suicide). One father is even gay, signalling within punk discourse his complete inability to act as a parent. One punk's life is ruined when his divorced mother remarries a man who is both a cop and, "even worse," black. Of course, film convention by the 1980s dictates that the black cop be the only understanding adult, even if the punks don't see it. Interestingly, the films argue against divorce and permissiveness, espousing postsuburban punk's anti-liberal, -California, -hippie stance. Many punk songs also took this position. At the same time, however, much of this era of punk was aimed at the oppressive, patriarchal nuclear family. Hardcore punk opposed the nuclear family as well as the lack of family structure, protesting against *both* suburban conformity and the disappearance of suburban security.

The election of Ronald Reagan in November of 1980 possibly did more than any other single event to revitalize punk and ensure its longevity, not only because punks opposed his conservative politics, but because here was an enemy with a face. Whereas earlier Hollywood punk had aimed its critique at "hippies" (be they music business executives, laid-back California folkies, or liberal politicians), now hardcore punk named Reagan as public enemy number one. The transformation was illustrated most starkly in the song "California Uber Alles" by the San Francisco band the Dead Kennedys. The song was originally an ironic stab at the "zen fascism" of Jerry Brown, but after Reagan's election, singer Jello Biafra rewrote the lyrics to remove the irony, as Reagan's America represented a real threat. While not many Southern California bands were as overtly and intellectually political as the Dead Kennedys, Reagan hovered over the scene as the great white father. Lyrics aimed at Reagan, and at the omnipresent specter of World War III, dominated the protest songs of hardcore punk. As Texan transplants MDC (Millions of Dead Cops) sang about Reagan's alterego: "John Wayne was a nazi .../but not anymore, life evened the score."

Reagan provided a focus for punk protest, but it was a focus which forced a redirection, and a confusion, of the meaning of punk. Reagan as fascist was an obvious and convenient target, but what about the "hippies"? Were these still the enemies? With regard to families, the anti-Reagan message made things more confusing, but it also made punk's message more all-encompassing. There was nothing in postsuburbia to embrace as one's own, whatever type of family one came from. Reagan stood for the Moral Majority's revival of the "traditional family." But postsuburban punk discourse can not be seen as only a rejection of this oppressive nuclear ideal. In fact, punks were the children of "hippies" -- that is, baby boomers with more liberal notions of child-rearing. As Mark Poster has argued, the family structure at the time in Orange County was much more emotionally open and less repressive than the traditional suburban, nuclear family. The middle-class family was not isolated from society, as the oedipal family was. The new family was, however, "segmented," rarely gathered together at the same time with "each individual following in part a course separate from the others." Further, Poster argues that there has been a "diffusion of emotional bonding" in the parent-child "love/authority structure" because of the penetration of the home by "electronically mediated communications systems." Poster is optimistic about this familial development, concluding it was, by the end of the eighties, "liberated" not "narcissistic," but he cautions that this family needs a new type of integration with the community, a kind of support that had certainly not developed. While family members were not isolated from society as they had been in suburbia, because kids went to preschool at an early age and the mother worked outside the home, the changes of identity and roles for parent and child were directly connected to the postmodern, postsuburban environment and its exaltation of consumerism.[25]

More important than whether punks actually came from "broken homes" or "dysfunctional families," postsuburban punk seemingly rejected both the traditional and the new types of families -- both the Reaganite "fascist" family and the liberal "hippie" family.[26] What united both family models in punk discourse was consumerism and its relation to the transformation of the home -- in particular, the role consumerism placed children in as active, "independent agents." As Alladi Venkatesh argues, "The parent is now both the consumer and the consumed. The child is simultaneously an adolescent and an adult."[27]

Postsuburban punk's addition to, or twist on, the rebellious teen narrative was its particular oedipal angle. London punk can be interpreted as a rejection of the mother -- the queen presiding over the declining empire and Thatcher ascending to power to dismantle the welfare state.

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[25] Mark Poster, "Narcissism or Liberation: The Affluent Middle-Class Family," in *Postsuburban California*, 190-222. See also, Larry H. Long and Paul C. Glick, "Family Patterns in Suburban Areas: Recent Trends," in Barry Schwartz, ed., *The Changing Face of the Suburbs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 39-67; and, Hugh A. Wilson, "The Family in Suburbia: From Tradition to Pluralism," in Barbara M. Kelly, ed., *Suburbia Re-examined* (New York: Greenwood, 1979), 85-93.

[26] Interviews with Matt Bokovoy (December 29, 1994) and Tony Reflex (July 12, 1995); and, Mike Boehm, "Kids of the Black Hole."

[27] Alladi Venkatesh, "Changing Consumption Patterns," in *Postsuburban California*, 155-56.

Postsuburban punk in Southern California tried to kill the father. But this father was a confusing figure. Cops everywhere, reappearing weekly at punk rock gigs, provided a real target for punk rage -- fathers with power, black-clad, domineering, inflicting corporal punishment -- with Reagan, off in the distance, the fuhrer of the army of fathers. But Reagan didn't fit always fit very well in the role of commander, of the father who wielded the belt. He was, instead, the absent patriarchal father, the one who ruled supposedly with iron fist in velvet glove, but who, in fact, ruled not at all. In punk discourse, this father vegged out in front of the tv, he became gay, he molested his children, he became more and more fascist as he drifted farther and farther from his children, or he disappeared altogether. He was both authoritarian and a cipher, both stupid enough to call punks "punkers" (and this enraged punks), and nasty enough to call out the police and all other forces at his disposal to oppress them.

The battle is played out in microcosm in possibly the most famous hardcore song (because of its inclusion in the *Repo Man* soundtrack), Suicidal Tendencies' "Institutionalized" which tells the story of parents who put their son in a mental hospital because "we're afraid you're gonna hurt somebody/we're afraid you're gonna hurt yourself." The son, in his critique of the institutions of home, family and school, replies with tremendous indignation: "What are you trying to say? *I'm* crazy/Well I went to *your* schools/I went to *your* churches/I went to *your* institutional learning facilities/How can you say I'm crazy?" His indignation rises with each line, until he explodes in rage, "All I wanted was a Pepsi, and they wouldn't give it to me, just one Pepsi, ... and they keep bugging me." The song builds from a crunching, grinding opening, with a meandering, metallic guitar lead and spoken lyrics telling matter-of-factly the tale of suburban teen angst, through a series of crescendos, stepping up in speed and intensity, until the chorus is a blinding, raging blur of hardcore punk chords and screaming "I'm not crazy! You're the one who's crazy! You're driving me crazy!" And then back down again for another spoken verse, to build back up to the chorus. Each verse advances the story of the misunderstood teen and the misunderstanding parents. After the third and final chorus, as the guitars and drums disintegrate, the singer says in resignation, "Doesn't matter, I'll probably get hit by a car anyway." The parents fulfill both Reagan roles: they take charge, they don't ignore the situation, but then they abdicate their duty, sloughing it off onto yet another institution. And the only institution the child feels at home in is the hyper-commercial one -- all he wants is a Pepsi, just one Pepsi, and they wouldn't give it to him.

The song works musically as an anthem and lyrically as a rallying cry -- like the Who's "My Generation" -- although an individualist one. How to interpret the song is open to the listener, maybe even more so than most songs. You can cry, you can break things. Or you can laugh. It is impossible to know if the singer is serious. The narrator writes his own name "Mike" in at the beginning, and this name is the same as the songwriter/singer. So it would seem to be autobiographical. But perhaps the narrator is trying to pull one over on us. Maybe when he denies to his parents he is on drugs, he is lying; heroin addicts, after all, crave the sugar in cola, and this is a familiar image. Maybe he is caricaturing the parent/child relationship -- maybe you are supposed to both recognize it and recognize it as a cliche. Maybe when he quotes the parents words we are supposed to see them as the cliched anti-youth parental fears. And then there is the fact that the narrator is, ultimately, no more than a spoiled child demanding his fulfillment: "All I wanted was a Pepsi" over and over again. For some listeners, in order to embrace the central message of the song, they have to distance themselves from this consumerist response. "Mike" may want a Pepsi, but other punks were not so sure. The Middle Class rejected consumerism in "Out of Vogue," Black Flag mocked it in "TV Party,"and the Descendents combined an ironic critiques of suburbia, domesticity, and adolescent male identity formation in "Suburban Home": "I want to be stereotyped/I want to be classified/I wanna be a clone/I want a suburban home/I wanna be masochistic/I wanna be a statistic/I don't want no hippie pad/I want a house just like mom and dad."

The oedipal tale of postsuburban punks was simultaneously an attempt to bring plot to the essentially plotless everyday, and to insert boys and their dads at the center of that plot. Mothers are conspicuously absent from hardcore punk lyrics. The plot was inevitably gendered, and postsuburban punk's critique of home and family links nicely with its emphasis on violence and its search for a personal politics -- the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Six: "Brats in Battalions": Hardcore punk rock, violence, and the politics of the local

On St. Patrick's Day 1979, a Wednesday night, a wedding was held at the Elks' hall in downtown Los Angeles, across the street from Macarthur Park. But that was not what brought the police there. Simultaneously in the hall was a punk rock show, with over six hundred people. The Zeros, veteran punks from San Diego, had opened the night, followed by Portland's Wipers and L.A.'s Go-Gos, who had dyed their hair green for the occasion. The Plugz took the stage, and scheduled to follow were the Alleycats and the current uncontested leaders of the L.A. scene, X. Instead, while the Plugz played, the LAPD arrived in full force. Dozens of officers in full riot gear surrounded the hall, and a helicopter circled in the sky, searchlight peering down, tracing ovals on the street and sidewalk, casting shadows on the cordon of cops lining the street.

A couple of undercover cops entered first, in blue jeans and denim jackets, flannel shirts, looking out of place not so much by their fashion, but by their furtiveness, their suspicions, their defensive postures which did not absorb but deflected the blows of other bodies slamming into them as they made their way up the stairs in the lobby, past the wedding on the second floor, to the third floor, to the large open room with a stage at one end where hundreds of punk rockers were pogoing to the Plugz.

Such postures showed they were not used to this sort of thing, and not particularly open to it either. Minutes later a few uniformed, riot-geared cops entered the back of the hall, and then left to the jeers of the crowd. Returning with reinforcements, they began to clear out the seats lining the side walls of the hall.

Outside, cops with helmets, shields and batons beat on punks who retreated to the park across the street to gather the beer and whiskey bottles they had emptied before the show. The bottles were gone, cleaned out by the police, so punks threw rocks, garbage, and whatever else they could find. Inside, singer/guitarist Tito Larriva announced into the mike, "We'll play one that the pigs can pogo along with," and the Plugz slammed into their revved up version of Richie Valens' "La Bamba" with Tito singing his revised lyrics, "Surrados capitalistas, mas bien fascistas, yo no soy fascista, soy anarchista" ("Shit face capitalists, better known as fascists, I am not a fascist, I am an anarchist.")[1] The p.a. was cut, and the Plugz continued with an instrumental version. Six cops began to rain blows with sticks on the head of one spectator who didn't move fast enough when they told him to leave. The last of the punks evacuated the hall, walked past the line of fifty-plus riot police down the stairs, out on to the sidewalk, and were steered around the corner under the helicopter's searchlights.[2]

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[1] Tito Larriva, Plugz interview, *Slash* [L.A.], Vol.1 No. 10, (May 1978), 18.

The night is important in the history of the scene because it was the first time that L.A. punks were attacked in such a fashion by the police. It was, in fact, the first police assault on a rock show since a Pink Floyd concert at the Sports Arena in 1970. Punks had encountered the authorities before; the Masque had been shut down more than once, and individual punks were always getting arrested. But they were usually arrested not for being punks, but for *acting* like punks -- meaning they probably had done plenty to deserve it. While the Masque was frequently closed by the police and fire departments for code violations, the club had first attracted the attention of the police when one drunken punk lay down in the street and shouted "Fuck you pigs!"[3] At a Ramone's show at the Whiskey the year before three L.A. sheriff's cars had pulled up to inspect the crowd outside, but the sheriffs had singled out a stoned surfer-type for arrest, not "punks." At another punk show the police had arrived, wandered around, even taken the stage, but found no one to arrest, leading to a comical scene and a running joke in punk circles whenever the police arrived that they were actually the next band.[4] What is difficult to ascertain is why the police came this night in the way they did to the Elks Lodge. It seems that a bottle was thrown in the lobby, and someone was cut. Possibly, the management of the Elks called in the police. But why did this bring the riot squad? And why were several punks beaten and bloodied, and eight arrested? The response of the LAPD at the Elks Lodge hearkens back to their response to the hippies who fought to abolish the curfew on Sunset Boulevard in 1966. Then, as in 1979, the LAPD, seeing young people out in public, dressed strangely and listening to weird music, sent in the riot squad to squash a perceived moral and civil threat.

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[2] The events at the Elks Lodge are reconstructed from interview with Stephen Shea and Katie Golden (January 12, 1995); interview with Raymond Bridgers (January 13, 1995), interview with Kristine McKenna (October 14, 1997); interview with Pooch (January 13, 1995); interview with Al Flipside (October 3, 1995); interview with Brendan Mullen (October 8, 1995); L.A. *Times*, March 19, 1979, sec. 1; L.A. *Times*, March 20, 1979, sec. iv; my own memories; Tom Griswold and Mikel Toombs, review in *Quasi-Substitute* [La Mesa, Ca.] #1 (1979), n.p.; *Slash*, Vol. 2 No. 5 (May 1979); *Flipside* 14 (April 1979); *Lobotomy* [L.A.], Vol. 2, No. 3 (April/May 1979); Jeff Spurrier, *"Los Angeles Punk Rock," Details*, (December 1994); Claude Bessy and Philomena Winstanley, interview in *Maximum Rocknroll* [S.F.] No. 127 (December 1993), n.p.; and, Craig Lee, "Los Angeles," in Peter Belsito and Bob Davis, eds., *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1983), 34-35.

Even more important for the histories of punk or youth in Southern California than the motivation of the police was the discursive use of the show for the establishment of a punk rock scene. Punks in L.A. used the police riot to (subculturally) legitimate the growing punk scene. In such songs as the Gears' "Elks Lodge Blues" and the Angry Samoans' "Pig" the riot is referred to as an historic event which provided a mythic focal point for punk in Southern California. Punks saw the Elks Lodge riot as the event that transformed punk. After that moment, L.A. punk took place in the world, rather than in some isolated subcultural scene. Punk was now political, not so much by its ideology as by its context. As Dez Cadena of Black Flag noted, "It was cool in LA all the way up to Elks Lodge." Bandmate Chuck Dukowski claimed of the "Elks Lodge Massacre," as it was hyperbolically termed:

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[3] Brendan Mullen, liner notes to *Live At the Masque* (Flipside Records).

[4] Review of Middle Class, Negative Trend, Weirdos and Dils at the Azteca, *Slash* Vol. 2, No. 1, (September 1978), 19.

> Riots, riots, riots. That's probably the worst police reaction ever. People were doing absolutely nothing and the cops came in and started dusting people off. The odd thing about these riots is that the cops are scared of it. They're scared of what they see in the music, what they see happening when people do it, the energy in it. They're scared of what might happen if someone like that had a direction and focussed that energy.[5]

L.A. punk, which had never been particularly politically oriented, became political at this moment because the context was new, the stakes had changed. People who previously may have had no reason to be attracted to punk were now drawn by the idea that it seemed to make authorities "scared." The Elks Lodge event occurred at a pivotal moment in the history of L.A. punk, just as the music was gaining a degree of mainstream legitimacy,[6] as more and more teens and young adults in the outlying areas were paying attention, precisely when L.A. punk was going postsuburban. The moment when punk became violent was, then, the exact moment when punk in Southern California became political.

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[5] "Black Flag [interview]," *Forget It!* [San Jose] No. 6, (ca. 1980), 21.

Hardcore can not be understood in terms of any specific political agenda in traditional right-left terms. All positions across the political spectrum were present, although hardcore punks were usually vaguely "anarchist" or "leftist," with most in Southern California disavowing any explicit political position. This chapter will examine the politics of hardcore punk -- and the explicit "non-political" stance of most punks -- by analyzing the violence within and around it. I will first explain this violence in terms of how punks fashioned themselves as a subculture in opposition to a dominant culture. I will then proceed to explain how this violence needs to be understood as a product of and response to the specific spatial parameters of everyday life in postsuburbia. Finally, this chapter will explain the politics of hardcore punk rock by examining the relationship between the production of space in postsuburbia and the violence of postsuburban punk rockers.

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[6] The event was, ironically, also as a sign of how far punk had come in being respectable. That is why it is remarkable that the police came at all. Punk was not usually seen as threatening in its current incarnation. The L.A. *Times* had two reporters there, who defended the punks, taking their side, claiming that the violence was completely instigated by the police. And they did not bury the story, at least not immediately, returning to it over the next weeks. The *Times*' music critics had by now almost completely embraced the local punk scene; while not giving enormous amounts of newsprint, generally writing positive reviews. The fact that two *Times* reporters attended the show attests to L.A. punk rock's acceptance, an acceptance which was not so much containment or cooptation as it was a sign of the blurring of the lines between subculture and dominant culture.

As this chapter will show, in the years following the Elks riot, violent conflict was inaugurated by police, punk-haters, and punks alike. What to make of all this violence? Most obviously, to outsiders hardcore punk represented a potential threat to the established order and a rejection of the dominant values of the local society. There may have been something to Dukowski's belief that punk posed a threat to the established order. Certainly, there was that possibility, and certainly the police and media responses seemed to indicate they saw punk as a social threat even before punks did. Punks in Huntington Beach and throughout the area were pulled over by the police and had their picture taken for the notorious punk rock file, while organized anti-punk vigilantes searched in gangs for punks to fight in the streets.[7] Soon, barely a gig would go by, it seemed, without the police showing up and beating up on punks. Punk style and behavior explicitly rejected "authority" so that hardcore punks provided parents, police, and the dominant media with a textbook-case "folk devil."

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[7] See Chris Martin, "Nobody Got Famous in H.B.," *Flipside* 92 (October/November 1994), n.p.; Adolescents interview on KNAC Radio, October 12, 1981; Interview with Eddie Subtitle in *Slash* Vol. 2, No. 10, (November 1979), 13.

violence, dominant culture, and hardcore punk rock

In the years after the Elks Lodge riot, a minor media panic developed in Los Angeles and nationally about the new punk called "hardcore." In the summer of 1980 the L.A. *Times* printed an expose on punk written by Patrick Goldstein describing a hardcore scene rife with violence, vandalism, self-mutilation, and clashes with police. Punk violence was blamed mostly on organized suburban and beach-area hardcore gangs who wreaked destruction both outside the clubs and in -- particularly on the dance floor. Punks, Goldstein wrote,

> don't just dance anymore. They mug each other.
>
> It's part of a new 'dance' craze called the Slam, whose popularity, especially with organized gangs of punk youths, has led to numerous incidents of violence at many area clubs.
>
> The accounts of senseless violence, vandalism and even mutilation at some area rock clubs read like reports from a war zone.[6]

The article signalled a new attitude in the dominant media toward punk rock, a new attitude resulting from the changes punk had undergone in its return to the United States. While punk rock had excited a media frenzy in 1976-77 in tabloid-mad England, until 1979 punk in the U.S. had never been portrayed as anything more than an imported oddity that would never catch on. By the late seventies punk had even gained a certain degree of musical acceptance, especially in Los Angeles.[9]

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[6] Patrick Goldstein, Los Angeles *Times*, June 29, 1980, Calendar section. Meanwhile, only a week before the *Times* had presented X, an older L.A. punk band (not hardcore), as one of the best of the year; compared to hardcore, punk now seemed respectable and mainstream. See L.A. *Times* June 22, 1980, Calendar section, and April 29, 1980, sec. VI.

The dominant media, however, took a different approach to the homegrown hardcore scene in the eighties. A variety of films, television shows and press reports introduced hardcore to a gradually widening audience. Science fiction and exploitation films such as "Class of 1984", "Road Warrior", and "Return of the Living Dead" were among the first to adopt the hardcore punk style of leather, spikes, chains and mohawks. The independent films "Suburbia" and "Repo Man" employed the hardcore punk attitude and setting for offbeat narratives which simultaneously sympathized with and exploited hardcore. Television weighed in most forcefully with exposes, as hardcore punk made ideal fodder for newsmagazines, audience participation talk shows, and cop shows. The crime dramas CHiPs and Quincy each devoted an episode to the hardcore scene which corrupted youth, destroyed families, and caused violence throughout middle America. The Donahue talk show invited hardcore punks and an organization called "Parents of Punkers" to debate the causes and consequences of hardcore. Jughead Jones, of Archie comics, went undercover as a punk for the school newspaper. *People* magazine brought the hardcore dance "the slam" to readers across America. And Sergeant Rick Hunter, played by ex-pro football player Fred Dryer, sported a blue mohawk while infiltrating a hardcore punk gang led by a biker played by another ex-pro football player, John Matuszak.[10]

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[9] For more on the U.S. media portrayal of punk, see my "'Social Distortion': The Rise of Suburban Punk Rock in Los Angeles," in Kristi S. Long and Matthew Nadelhaft eds., *America Under Construction: Boundaries and Identities in Popular Culture* (New York: Garland, 1997), 123-148.

Even more significant than the portrayal of punks by the dominant media was the use of that portrayal by hardcore punks in Southern California. In a sense, hardcore punks depended on the media condemnation for their identity -- especially their political identity. Punks blamed the *Times'* article on violence in hardcore punk for misrepresentation, and universally and ultimately mythically reviled Goldstein, who was accused of inventing the term "slam dancing."[11] And, he and the rest of the supposedly irresponsible, ratings-hungry media were despised for spreading the wrong message about punk to the world, thus inviting violence-prone lunkheads to become punks. *Flipside* predicted in July 1980, "The fact that the L.A. Times recognized it at all, will make it worse, more security, more blacklisting and more violence, until it's on the front page...."[12] And the hardcore punk writer Shreader remembered of the *Times'* expose a few years later:

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[10] "Class of 1984" dir. Mark Lester 1981; "Road Warrior" 1981; "Return of the Living Dead" dir. Dan O'Bannon, 1984; "Suburbia" dir. Penelope Spheeris, 1983; "Repo Man" dir. Alex Cox, 1984; *CHiPs*, "Battle of the Bands," originally aired January 31, 1982; *Quincy*, "Next Stop, Nowhere" by Sam Egan, dir. Ray Danton, originally aired December 1, 1982; Donahue, "Parents of Punkers" Transcript #01212, Episode #760, aired January 21, 1982; *Jughead* No. 327, February 1983 (New York: Archie Comic Publications, Inc.); *People* 19:96-97 March 28, 1983; *Hunter*, "Death Machine" by Tom Lazarus, dir. Kim Manners, originally aired March 11, 1986.

[11] See Interview with Black Flag by Tim Tonooka in *Ripper* [San Jose] #3 (1980), 15; and, editorial, *Flipside* 19 (July 1980), n.p.

> This freely exploited and made media-meat out of the suburban Punk scene, citing that punks (especially Orange County kids) were criminal, vicious, and **dangerous**. Naturally this drew a whole new wave of fungus out of places too placid to even **be** suburbs, who read "Punk rock" as "drawing blood."[13]

Punks accused the media of spreading the wrong word, of inciting violence, bringing violent types in and bringing down the wrath of the police and other authorities. Whatever the cause of the change, a punk show became an undeniably violent affair. The violence within the punk scene -- police raids, fights between punks and "rednecks" or "hippies," and fights between rival punks -- escalated just as hardcore punk began to replace "art-damaged" punk. The rise of postsuburban punk coincided with the beginnings of police violence against punks, and the beginnings of violence by punks against other punks, and against anyone else.

The newly politicized stance of hardcore held absolutely no ideological consistency. Whereas in Northern California's Bay Area punks used the "media blitz" to fashion a leftist critique of the institutions of the dominant media and political elite,[14] in postsuburban Southern California, the politics were diffuse, inconsistent, cohering only vaguely around such words as "anarchy," "destroy," and "my rules." Without a doubt hardcore punks saw their attitudes and behavior as holding political significance, but defined their politics by environment more than ideology. It was a politics of everyday life, of the "struggle for life" that Michel de Certeau outlines as central to "relational tactics." Violence was central to that politics.

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[12] Editorial, *Flipside* 19 (July 1980), n.p.
[13] Shreader in *Hardcore California*, 47-48.

violence, tactics, and everyday life in postsuburbia

The rise of postsuburbia transformed the everyday lives of young people. Everyday life as a theoretical model was developed originally to explain the postwar urban environment. The proximity of person to person, of the street as both thoroughfare and gathering place -- these facts gave to everyday life its peculiar and mundane character, inspiring thinkers such as Lefebvre, de Certeau and Blanchot.[15] But the aspects of "everyday life in the modern world" that they ascribe to the city -- boredom, alienation, reification, fetishism, cybernetization, hyperreality -- have been emphasized and altered in postsuburbia, in what Edward Soja calls the "creatively erosive postmodern geographies ... where *everyday life* is thematically spin doctored and consciousness itself comes in prepackaged forms."[16] The car, the mall, the office park and tract home replaced the street as the sites for everyday life. What was historically new by the 1970s was the destruction of public space, and the accompanying commodification of private space.

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[14] The major forces behind the politicization of punk in Northern California were the people associated with the radio show and zine *Maximum Rocknroll*, but punk culture in general in the area was conducive to a leftist version of anarchism, especially in the East Bay scene centered in Berkeley. See Jeff Goldthorpe, "Intoxicated Culture: Punk Symbolism and Punk Protest," Socialist Review Vol. 22, No. 2 (April-June 1992), 35-64; and Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, (London and New York: Verso, 1997), esp. Chapter 8.

An erasure of the distinction between public and private life in Southern California occurred through struggles over space. Mike Davis described the development industry -- what he calls the New Octopus -- as dominating politics in Southern California. Particularly in Orange

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[15] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*, (New York: Verso, 1991); Maurice Blanchot, "Everyday Speech," *Yale French Studies*, Number 73 (1987), 12-20; and Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, vol. 100. no. 1 (February 1995), 1-20.

[16] Edward Soja, "Inside Exopolis: Scenes from Orange County," in Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Noonday, 1992), 121.

County, the Irvine Company held almost complete control over the political, economic and social development of the region in the postwar period.[17] By the 1970s, political solutions emerged from what Edward Soja calls a "six-sided contest for power" between besieged military contractors, homeowners associations, environmental activists, land-hungry developers, demanding local political leaders, reporters and imagineering specialists. To these six, I would add the increasingly influential representatives of multinational capital who were often able to impose demands on the local leaders and interests. Even with this important new player on the scene, Soja is right to claim that in Orange County power revolves around the "recentered local politics of the exopolis, where everything seems to revolve around emplacement and position, or ... 'the little tactics of the habitat.'"[18] Power is struggled for and exercised through land -- that is, through place and space, through what Michel de Certeau calls "spatial practices."[19]

De Certeau argues that those in power can act strategically, through space, while those out of power -- by which he means most people, not only the traditionally marginalized groups -- act tactically, through temporary encroachments on, poachings of, the space of the dominant. De Certeau developed this theory in order to explain the behavior of consumers, in particular to define the act of consumption as a type of tactical production. The focus is on everyday practices, ways of operating, of making do, as the center of analysis, not merely as the obscure background of social activity, nor as simply reflective or reactive. De Certeau focusses on the activity of consumption -- the most daily of activity in our world -- as a type of usage, and thus of production. He calls attention to "the tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend[ing] a political dimension to everyday practices." This is explicitly a way of seeing how the dominated in society put to use the products, words, and ideas imposed by the dominant economic, linguistic and ideological orders. Importantly, for de Certeau domination occurs not simply along race, gender or class lines but through the articulation of power in spatial practices. These practices make almost everyone, even middle class punk rockers in Southern California, potentially part of the dominated; as de Certeau writes, "Marginality is becoming universal."[20]

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[17] See Martin J. Schiesl, "Designing the Model Community: The Irvine Company and Suburban Development, 1950-88," in Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster eds., *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 55-91.

[18] Soja, in Sorkin, 116-117.

[19] de Certeau, 96.

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[20] de Certeau, xvii. In part, Certeau's notion of everyday life follows Michel Foucault who attempted to trace the "microphysics of power," that is the establishment of discipline in all its details. But Foucault still privileges the productive apparatus, underestimating the

As youth in postsuburbia, punks were marginalized in specific ways. According to de Certeau's theory of everyday life, strategy belongs to those in power, firmly rooted in a place; tactics are for those marginalized, homeless, who have to play the game of everyday life within the rules set by those in power. Poaching is how the marginalized best insert themselves into the landscape, into history: "Everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others."[21] De Certeau's use of the notions of property, space, strategy vs. tactics, and poaching are useful in understanding punk rock, even if they are a bit reductive. The opposition de Certeau makes behind tactics and strategies is too simplistic, and punks used both. Further, this dichotomy too easily creates a sense of everyday life as simply a reflection of the struggle between the empowered and the powerless. It reproduces at bottom a base/superstructure model, even if de Certeau does grant more agency than Foucault does to "consumers." But the analogy works well for hardcore punk rockers, because their violent responses to the postsuburban landscape reflected just the military analogy de Certeau draws. While Henri

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ability of people to not only resist, but shape the development of power. That is, Foucault leaves no room for people to act as agents. Certeau's everyday life, on the other hand, concentrates on exploring those "multiform, resistan[t], tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised."

[21] de Certeau, xii.

Lefebvre argues that "brutal assertiveness" provides inadequate compensation for the "deep and multiple frustrations" engendered by youth's "marginal everyday life," hardcore punks attempted just this type of compensation.[22]

If in postsuburbia power is exercised through space, hardcore punks attempted to intercede in their communities through spatial practices. In response to their position in the consumerist postsuburban environment, punks acted tactically in ways that both challenged and reproduced the dominant ideologies of postsuburbia. The punk subculture mirrored the decentralized nature of postsuburbia, and reflected the nature of power and politics in Orange County. In articulating a tactical politics, punks rejected both consumerism and, importantly, a universal model of youth culture which had motivated an earlier generation. Their conceptions of citizenship and community were localized, fragmented, even ephemeral.

In contrast to the search for stability ("strategic" responses) discussed in the last chapter, punks also interceded, as de Certeau would say, tactically, locally, at the level of consumption, on the dominant institutions and discourses of society.[23] Many of the activities of postsuburban punks can be seen as a kind of poaching: of appropriation and inscription. The mere act of dressing punk was an act of appropriation, of the type of bricolage that Dick Hebdige describes of London punk.[24] The Southern California hardcore punk style also appropriated from local cultures -- Chicano gang style and especially surfing and skateboarding. Punk at the beach intertwined with surf culture. While partly a rejection, it also transformed.

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[22] Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 91.
[23] de Certeau, ix.

Some surfers became punks. They redesigned their surfboards to be considerably shorter, with two or three fins instead of one, for easier maneuverability on the small waves which were the norm; "aggro" surfers now "shredded" the wave, rather than simply respond to and mesh with nature as the "hippie" surfers had.[25] Surfing served not as a means of getting in touch with Mother Nature, but of dominating her.[26] Skateboarding, similarly, inscribed punks into the landscape, as both the (emptied) pools of suburbia and the (surveilled) office parks of technoburbia presented perfect, if dangerous, opportunities for poaching on someone else's space.[27]

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[24] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Routledge, 1979).

[25] Interview with Jon Lalanne, January 12, 1995.

[26] Incidentally, this dovetailed in interesting ways with another dominant 1980s motif, Reaganomics. The punk influence on surfing brought in a revolution in design, with boards having wild patterns and bright colors; wet suits were for the first time not basic black but multicolored and dayglo; and surfing surged forward as a big business, with influence on national fashions and merchandising (as it had a couple of times before in the postwar era) but also as a competitive sport with major corporate sponsors and large money tournaments. Punk surfers also heightened the territorialism of surf culture, a feature which was already existent and intensified with the increased popularity of surfing in the early eighties.

Punks also poached living, business, and performance spaces by squatting or renting abandoned industrial spaces. Clubs continually opened and closed, often in different locations scattered all over the Southern California area, connected by the criss-crossing lines of the freeways.[28] Most often punks played parties or in clubs and halls that only lasted for a few months, often shut down because of the violence. And even this violence may be viewed as inscription and poaching.

Punks did not own the streets or the malls or the corridors in the high school. They could get beaten up for looking punk, even arrested or photographed by the police.[29] As the Battalion of Saints sang, "Cops are out, I run and hide/They're looking for me, And I don't know why."[30] One way for punks to take power was to walk down the streets in packs or (occasionally) organized gangs. The tactic was defensive, in the sense of always being ready to defend against violent attacks by so-called "rednecks" or "jocks"; but beyond the military tactical analogy, the other tactics had to do with identity, with taking space in order to create a self and a community, to be the "Boys in the Brigade," as the Youth Brigade sang. Gangs like the La Mirada Punks fought regularly against both the La Mirada Stoners (non-punks) and other punk gangs, mingling identity and community concerns, both defining identity through insider/outsider distinctions and contesting the definition of "punk."[31] Punk gangs, both loose and organized, poached on alien turf, and organized themselves into alternative communities. Punk poaching reflected its politics, and the larger arena of politics in Southern California.

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[27] Matt Bokovoy clued me in to this aspect of skate punk culture. See also the interviews in the early 1980s with hardcore punk bands in the skateboarding magazine *Thrasher*. Listen, also, to the Adolescents' "Skate Babylon."

[28] The Starwood and Whiskey in Hollywood changed their policies on booking punk seemingly every month. The Costa Mesa community board eventually succeeded in closing down the punk club the Cuckoo's Nest for good after the case had gone to the state supreme court. Joe Vex ran "the Vex" in no fewer than three locations, being shut down continually by the fire and police departments. See *Flipside*, 24, (May 1981), n.p.

[29] Interview with Adolescents, KNAC Radio, October 12, 1981.

[30] Battalion of Saints, "Cops are Out."

"the watts riot of the middle classes"

The politics of Southern California have been throughout the century largely conservative. In Los Angeles, the right-wing "Otis-Chandler dynasty" of the *Times* headed up a downtown establishment which competed since the 1920s with a more liberal, Democratic Westside leadership for hegemony.[32] Orange County voted Republican in every presidential election in the century, with the exception of the Depression years 1932 and 1936. Further, with the establishment of the John Birch Society and the county's pivotal role in swinging the 1964 California Republican primary to Barry Goldwater, Orange was established as the standard bearer of what Kevin Phillips called in 1970, "the emerging Republican majority." The new "populist conservatism" of Orange County placed it no longer on the outside of mainstream politics but firmly on the leading edge, so much so that one scholar could title his 1974 book on "the future of American politics," *As Orange Goes.*[33]

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[31] Interview with Blaze James, October 3, 1995.

[32] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 101.

The politics of Southern California in the 1970s were increasingly conservative, and increasingly centered around issues of homeowner self-defense. No longer were homeowners concerned with the establishment of the suburban ideal: "roughly since the beginning of the Kennedy-Johnson boom[,] homeowner politics have focussed on *defense* of the suburban dream against unwanted development (industry, apartments and offices) as well as against unwanted persons."[34] The "politics of exclusion,"[35] a national phenomenon, were especially pronounced in the region as developers strived to fill in any open spaces. At the same time, locally the price of real estate--and accompanying property taxes--exploded. As David Clark writes,

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[33] Karl A. Lamb, *As Orange Goes: Twelve California Families and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1974), 3-5. Lamb points out that in 1968 there were 3,000 members of the John Birch Society in Orange County out of a population of 1.3, a percentage which does not fit with the contemporary public image of Orange County-ites as rabid Birchers, 14.

[34] Davis, 170.

[35] Michael N. Davidson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1976).

> Housing demand increased as the baby boom generation matured and formed new households, and migration to the area resumed when the aerospace industry came out of its early 1970s slump. In 1970 the average Southern California home sold at the national medium price of $32,000. By mid-1981 the average U.S. home price came to $74,000, but in the Los Angeles five-county area the figure had shot up to $118,000. Skyrocketing prices led to sky-high tax assessments.[36]

The conservative politics of the region centered around homeowners associations which began to oppose further development, in defense of their property values and lifestyles. In Orange County community activists opposed the Industrial League, which represented such firms as Northrop, Rockwell International, and the Flour Corporation, in a grassroots campaign against unregulated land development.[37] Clark argues that a conservative politics was also fostered by the new immigration to the region of a new type of employee for these firms: "The heavy concentration of aerospace and defense business in a traditionally conservative region encouraged the new middle class of Space Crescent technicians and managers to develop into the most dynamic force behind the nation's current conservative trend."[38]

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[36] David L. Clark, "Improbable Los Angeles," in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 296.

[37] Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 147.

Within the context of the national post-1968 conservative turn in American politics, economic uncertainty and "stagflation," and myriad local issues involving growth and racial and class conflict, Southern California homeowners were hit with exorbitant property tax increases. In the mid-1960s Los Angeles County assessor Philip E. Watson began a campaign to reform property values and tax rates. In response to a irrational, scandalous, corrupt, pro-business, and unequal system, Watson's office planned to assess all property at 25 percent of market price. Unfortunately, and ironically, in what Clarence Lo calls "the misdirected efforts of progressive reformers," the new policy shifted the property tax burden onto homeowners, making them particularly "vulnerable to the inflation of home prices, which would automatically trigger higher assessments."[39] By the mid-1970s, both Los Angeles and Orange Counties, in attempting to rationalize their property tax systems, were using, in addition, computers and regression analysis to reappraise hundreds of thousands of properties. While higher property value assessments would potentially increase the wealth and status of homeowners, the tax rates were crippling, especially for retirees in the San Fernando Valley and Orange County. Not only were property values, and their assessed tax rates, exponentially higher, but the new system was so bureaucratic that government officials were completely unresponsive to the frustrations of homeowners. Lo argues that it was this frustration, what he calls the "frustrated advantage" of the upper-middle class -- with its "advantages in class, status, and/or political power in some arenas, but relative powerlessness in other arenas" -- which led the homeowner's associations to organize and revolt against "unresponsive big government."[40]

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[38] Clark, 285.

[39] Clarence Y.H. Lo, *Small Property Versus Big Government: Social Origins of the Property Tax Revolt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 11, 10.

The most visible manifestation of the new politics of the region (and the nation) was this homeowner revolt which culminated in the tax-protest measure Proposition 13 in 1978, for which homeowners, particularly in the San Fernando Valley, provided the "shock troops."[41] Mike Davis describes the conflict in his most elegant prose:

> The folk maxim that gaunt men rebel while fat men sleep was neatly reversed by the historic suburban protests of 1976-9. In face of a massive inflationary redistribution of wealth, it was the haves, not the have-nots, who raised their pikes in the great tax revolt and its kindred school and growth protests. Many of the actors in this drama were the direct beneficiaries of one of the largest mass windfalls of wealth in history.[42]

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[40] Lo, 42, 72.

[41] Davis, 156.

[42] Davis, 180.

But as Clarence Lo has shown, the crabgrass-roots political movement was not only inspired by the sentiment of "I've got mine, so to Hell with the rest of you."[43] Homeowners simply could not pay their property taxes. Their anger over this issue combined with the Supreme Court order to integrate the Los Angeles County schools through busing, "a host of new growth-related complaints," and an increasing frustration with unresponsive, bureaucratic and fragmented governments to sweep the state.[44] While the campaign initially focussed only on residential property, not commercial, Proposition 13 limited taxes to 1% of all property. The campaign had begun in homeowners' associations in the middle class suburbs of the San Fernando Valley, but was "hijacked" by upper-middle-class homeowners and big business interests. It was this development which led to the upward redistribution of wealth with Prop. 13.

The politics of hardcore punks reflected the general tenor of politics in postsuburbia and in California more generally in the 1970s and 80s, defined by one scholar as a "politics of exclusion." As the regions sprouted more and more gated residential communities, malls with panoptic surveillance systems, and the office towers of what Mike

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[43] Lo; the quote comes from Clark, to describe the "motto of Southern California politics as the 1980s opened," 297.

[44] Davis, 181; Lo.

Davis calls "Fortress L.A.," punks, who had no land, property, or public space to call their own, poached on the symbols and space of the dominant culture. As the "excluded," hardcore punks in turn fashioned their own politics based upon exclusion and the limited aims of defensible space -- a politics with violence at its core.

"bored boys with nothing to do"

By the fall of 1980, hardly a show went by without some major conflagration, whether ignited by punks or police. On September 19th, the brand-new Hideaway Club was set to open up with a show by Black Flag, Geza X and the Mommymen, Circle Jerks, the Descendents, the Stains and Mad Society (continuing after hours with performances by UXA, Saccharine Trust and the Minutemen). Over 1200 punks showed up. More than 300 were still waiting outside as the first band went on, and only two bands had played by 1 a.m. Poor planning, bad ventilation and inept door management brought violence. The punks broke down the door to get in (using a car as a battering ram), and broke down the door again later to get out. Inside, they kicked holes in all the newly sheetrocked walls, finally knocking down the wall dividing the main hall from the lobby where kids still waited to pay and get in. The punks trashed the club, and the police showed up and closed down the show.[45]

A few weeks later, on October 8th, a Wednesday night, Black Flag and DOA were scheduled to play two sets at the Whisky a Go Go on Sunset, a rare hardcore gig at the Whiskey. As the audience from the very intense, successful first show filtered out onto Sunset, while the line of several hundred ticket holders for the second show waited, a single L.A. County Sheriffs' Department car pulled up. Cops and punks exchanged words. A punk lofted a Budweiser at the patrol car. The sheriffs radioed for reinforcements. The club owner cancelled the second show and, one witness reported, "hell broke loose with bottles raining from all directions."[46]

> Within minutes, the intersections a block above and below on Sunset were barricaded by police cars, traffic was diverted down side streets and no less than twenty-three cop cars came tearing up, lights and sirens blazing. An unmarked blue car unloaded four cops in full riot gear, and one of them got out clutching a shotgun tightly to his chest. The cops deployed and began chasing people up and down the street.[47]

The worst episode was yet to come. On Friday, October 24, 1980, nearly a thousand punks showed up for a show by Black Flag, the Skrews, and UXA at Baces Hall, a club in East Hollywood with a capacity of 300. San Francisco punk

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[45] See *Flipside* 20 (October 1980) and *Damage [S.F.]* 11 (December 1980). See also *Outcry* [South Pasadena] No. 1, (ca. 1981).

[46] Brendan Mullen, "L.A. [report]," *Damage* 11 (December 1980), 33.

[47] Jonathan Formula, "Welcome to the War Zone: The Suburbs Strike Back," *Damage* 11 (December 1980), 42.

Jonathan Formula, visiting the southland to research an article on the new hardcore punk scene, reported:

> The police seemed to have prepared for this one in advance, as a phalanx of riot-equipped officers confronted the hundreds of kids unable to get in off the street. Whereas the Whiskey incident was a punk rout, with cops hastily conferring about tactics before chasing people around in every direction, at Bace's the kids stood up against the men in blue for as long as they could, with rocks and bottles flying out from behind the front lines. With a military precision reminiscent of the nefarious Elk's Lodge blitz of recent years, the formation of cops pulled on black leather gloves, pulled out riot sticks from their belts in unison, and took a few steps towards the crowd in formation before breaking ranks and chasing down singled-out targets from the groups of kids attempting to escape down the squad-car blockaded street. Inside the club, the cops were held back temporarily by the promoter, who told them that a riot would ensue if the plug were pulled. Halfway through Black Flag's set, probably coinciding with the arrival of reinforcements, the cops decided it was time to clear the house, and Black Flag continued to play right up until their instruments were yanked out of their hands, at which point they sat down on stage to avoid providing any excuse for skullcrackery.[46]

The police were becoming increasingly zealous and organized in their violence against punks. But much of the punk violence also resulted from the popularity of hardcore. As new kids converted to punk every day, the audiences outgrew the capacities of the clubs, surprising the bookers and owners who underestimated hardcore's drawing power. Although Black Flag had warned the promoter at the Whiskey about the size and nature of their crowd, he couldn't believe the band would actually sell out two shows on a

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[46] Jonathan Formula, 42.

Wednesday night. The woman who booked the Hideaway gig had been pleasantly surprised at the success of her first promotion of a punk show a few weeks before and seriously underestimated the kind of management skills necessary to handle ten bands and over a thousand punks. But at least some of the violence came from the punks themselves, of course.

After all, punks were violent, weren't they? Well, earlier punks would claim they knew it was simulated, and they were more likely to beat themselves up, and get beaten up by others, than to hurt each other or go out in gangs beating up hippies. Most likely, early punks would get bruised and battered by the stairs leading down into the Masque as they fell drunkenly into the club. Certainly, in Hollywood the only violence among punks one sees evidence of was among the female punks, usually fighting each other in the halls of the Canterbury. Watch Hollywood punk Pat Smear, Germs' guitarist, interviewed in the film *Decline of Western Civilization* claiming "I've probably punched everyone I know. But then I ran because I'm basically a coward." Then watch hardcore punks Eugene and X-Head extolling the virtues of beating up "hippies 'n' shit."[49] The earlier punks were more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators, and their violence emanated from a desire to defy convention and live dangerously. Hardcore punks liked to inflict damage.

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[49] Penelope Spheeris, dir., *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981).

Indeed, the new hardcore punks were violent, even before the Goldstein article came out. The new scene centered itself in Huntington Beach, and the HBs, as they were called, represented a new breed of punk. They liked to fight. Not all of them, of course, and some came to punk for the music, or the punk ideology, or just getting wasted. But from the beginning, violence lay at the core of the new beach scene. Musically and stylistically, friction arose between the day glow surf punk set (centered on the band the Crowd) and the leather, boots and chains crowd from Surfside, but they would all play parties together, fight each other, and unite to beat the shit out of "hippies" who invaded their backyard parties. As one punk remembered after relating a story about thirty punks breaking a "hippie's" legs and throwing him off a bridge,

> You might think we were violent. I guess we were, violence was a daily thing. The more rotten or fucked you were, the cooler you were. We pushed the limits -- sometimes they snapped. It was about energy, outrageousness, and anarchy. It was about shock value. ... Punk rock made us feel alive.... You never knew when a carload of hippies, jocks, or vigilante construction worker dads would decide to jump out of a car and beat the shit out of you. Walking alone was always a thrill.[50]

For hardcore punks, violence made a "daily thing" into a

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[50] Chris Martin, "Nobody Got Famous in H.B.," *Flipside* 92 (October/November 1994), n.p.

"thrill," the mundane, extraordinary -- particularly within the context of the postsuburban landscape, where pedestrians were isolated and vulnerable. This was certainly one way to beat "boredom," to "feel alive." Jack Grisham, lead singer of the pioneering Vicious Circle (later T.S.O.L.) admitted to becoming a punk (after being a "troublemaking surfer") for the fights, not the music, "you know ... just have a few beers and get in a fight":

> See we were big guys. Everyone would fuck with punks, but we were big enough so that when people said "Fuck you, punks", we would go "No, fuck you, let's go", then we'd stop and fight 'em all. There were all these battles going on. The metalheads who hated punks, the cops thought we were freaks. We were fighting all the hippies, all the bikers, everybody. Every where I went. Going to the liquor store was a big event.[51]

Again, the mundane became extraordinary in the context of punk rock, and the mundane landscape of everyday life in postsuburbia was turned into something exceptional. The most basic of events for a rebellious youth, going to the liquor store to steal beer or convince someone over twenty-one to purchase it, became a "big event," a chance to fight. The fights were not so much over turf, like traditional urban gangs, because punks claimed no turf outside of their clubs as their own. As all space belonged to someone else, all space was also potentially arenas for tactical violence with no larger purpose than the fighting itself. Hardcore punks felt no need to claim any larger goal.

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[51] "The Joykiller [interview with Jack Grisham by Blaze James and Al Flipside]," *Flipside* 100 (February/March 1996), n.p.

Hardcore punks took a part of the punk philosophy and distilled it down to the core of rage. It was expressed in Black Flag's music: the "soundtrack for Armageddon," as one Bay Area punk described it.[52] It was expressed in the lyrics to such songs as "Nervous Breakdown," "I've Had It," and "No Values." Combined with that rage was a redefined punk version of anarchy. If early Hollywood punk had derived much of its stated political philosophy from the Situationists, via London punk, the new punks took the punk code words and refashioned them.[53] Above all, hardcore punk anarchy meant no rules. No rules to a teenage boy, newly turned punk, usually meant the freedom to get wasted, hang out with your bros, and break things up. As one "Aitch Bee" punk remembered: "Around each band there were usually a couple nuts. In some cases (V.C., T.S.O.L., The Outsiders, The Slashers) the nuts were in the band. We all drank a lot. The more we drank and got high, the crazier it would get. We were seventeen, loaded and invincible."[54] As the Circle Jerks sang, adopting a youth slogan that went back at least to the fifties, "Live fast/Die young."

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[52] Jeffrey Bale, "Black Flag: Soundtrack for Armageddon," *Damage* 11 (December 1980), 11.

[53] I don't mean to set up an invidious distinction here, with Hollywood punks more properly "political" in their philosophy. Clearly, the Masque scene was as much about having fun and getting wasted as about rebellion.

[54] Martin.

Unlike Hollywood punk, which had focussed on a set of institutions -- a club, a zine or two, a slew of bands and their friends -- the H.B. scene became delineated by bands. Each of the bands had their friends and followers, their "bros," who would travel with them from gig to gig, party to party. The media and the police labelled these groups of guys (and it was almost always guys) "gangs" and there was some truth to the accusation. Punks would deny it, and the groups were never organized or hierarchical, but they did gather together: "Every band had their bros and bros stick together." Sometimes they took a name without a band such as the Wayward Cains: "you needed to be a punk and a bit nuts. No rules, no ranks, no leaders, just anarchy where you could make it or find it."[55]

Built into the hardcore show was the "dance floor" of barely (and not always) controlled violence. Jonathan Formula described "the boiling, roiling, leaping, writhing, frenzied crowd":

> I couldn't focus my eyes on the kids thrashing down below, I could only see a huge, bubbling mass of boots, bandannas, chains, black and red and faded blue, contorted faces, crazy colors and chromed spikes, swirling like a colony of angry young urban microbes under a microscope. It was like looking into the face of a tidal wave.[56]

Spot, Black Flag sound engineer and occasional bouncer, described the scene at the Fleetwood, a large Redondo Beach punk venue:

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[55] Martin.

[56] Jonathan Formula, "Introduction," to *Hardcore California*, 5.

> The epitomy (sic) of the Hate-Kill-Destroy "Ethic" where the Huntington Beach types reigned. The HBs were all leather jackets, chains, macho, bloodlust, and bravado, and exhibited blatantly stupid military behavior. It was never a dull moment. There was a mass brawl every five minutes and as stage manager I had a chance to witness them all. Sure, the fights were quite pointless but they were determined to happen.

Spot can not articulate any explanation for why the fights were "determined to happen," because the "point" of the fighting was buried in the middle of his description: "It was never a dull moment."

By 1980 the letters sections of all the zines were filled with debates about the meaning of punk violence. While many letters decried the supposedly false media stereotype, more often the debate over violence cohered around questions of who was a "real" punk. One punk wrote to *Flipside* in 1981:

> I'm writing this letter to all the people who keep writing in complaining about the 'new punks' of the 'HB's'. You keep saying that they are cloning themselves and that they are quoat (sic) 'passe' and that somebody has to change to make the quoat (sic) 'scene' better, well FUCK OFF!... And you call the new people trendies because they don't wear what your (sic) wearing. Well your (sic) just part of that new trend: The individual trend.... P.S. This fighting has got to stop, punk vs. punk is BULLSHIT!! Those of you who go to gigs and fight are gonna end up getting your asses kicked in the end. Besides it's not worth it. We all have the same basic idea, so if your (sic) gonna fight, fight the hippies, besides you can grab their hair.[57]

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[57] *Flipside* 24 (1981), n.p.

After the Goldstein article the debate raged over whether "real" punks beat up other punks or not. Both sides claimed the status of real for themselves. And both agreed, for the most part, that beating up "hippies" was acceptable, maybe even necessary. Another letter, from "the silent majority" accused *Flipside* of giving too much positive attention to Huntington Beach punks who did not deserve it because "HB's go out of their way to beat someone up, or knife a person ... they seem to think violence is cool or scars on your arm look tough."[58] Hudley from *Flipside* responded that "mindless violence is fucked, but that's just a reality we have to deal with right now!!!!" Again, this violence was "determined to happen." Steve Stiph editorialized in his *Outcry* zine:

> And why is it that certain assholes who are always fighting seem to have a following of people who think they're cool and look up to them. Could be because most of these "blind sheep" are wimps who need "gang mentality" to achieve a feeling of power.... [T]here do seem to be some thickheads who think it's their call in life to control the action in "the pit" at local punk gigs. If you drive somebody off the dance floor or beat them up because they don't "look cool", then you're not only a jerk -- you'r also a conformist! That's right -- you can have a mohawk (or a skinhead, or blue hair or whatever...) and still be a conformist.[59]

These kinds of exchanges were, next to the accounts of the music, the dominant material in zines. Many punks wrote letters to zines arguing that punks should unite, because they generally shared the same values, against oppressive outsiders. But the fact that these punks had to continue writing letters demonstrated that not all punks agreed. The rhetorical response they would use then was to say that the violent punks were not "real" punks, they were "posers" and "clones." But this was the same line of "reasoning" used by the violent punks to choose their victims.

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[58] *Flipside* 24.

[59] *Outcry*, No. 3 (1982), n.p.

Two songs by the Adolescents from opposite sides of their first album indicate the conflict over violence within hardcore:

"Wrecking Crew"

There's nothing to do
excitement level zero
I cant find a girl
cos their all out chasing heros
WE'RE JUST A WRECKING CREW
BORED BOYS WITH NOTHING TO DO

. . .

safety in numbers
an enemy to beat
let's overturn cars
and rip up the street
tired of being a peaceful citizen
noise and destruction are in my vision
WE'RE JUST A WRECKING CREW
BORED BOYS WITH NOTHING TO DO

you're not all by yourself
you've got a few friends
when we become one
the violence never ends
WE'RE JUST A WRECKING CREW
BORED BOYS WITH NOTHING TO DO

"Rip It Up"

Like clockwork orange
bit of twenty on one
breaking heads
don't sound like much fun

is that your only way
of get, of getting kicks
by breaking heads
you know you can't fix

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TOUGH
WHEN YOU RIP IT UP?
GOTTA RIP YOU UP
YOU GOTTA RIP IT UP
GOTTA RIP IT UP
GOTTA RIP IT UP

I've had enough of violence
just to kill boredom
makes no sense
we're not the background
for your stupid fights
get out of the darkness
time to unite

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TOUGH
COS YOU RIP IT UP?
GOTTA RIP YOU UP
YOU GOTTA RIP IT UP
GOTTA RIP IT UP (rep.)

"Wrecking Crew" sings the praises of the pure joy felt in being an invincible teenager, of being able to get in a fight with a very good shot at winning ("safety in numbers"), of submerging one's identity in a mass. The purpose of punk rock is no more than to alleviate "boredom" through violence. On the flipside of the album, the Adolescents condemn gang violence within punk. This was not simply a case of cognitive dissonance, or teenage stupidity. The sentiments of both songs were necessary to hardcore punk. "Wrecking Crew" presents the attractions of punk to a young male in postsuburban Southern California. "Rip It Up" presents the problems that arise once one has embraced the punk scene -- no one is safe from attack. "Just to kill boredom/makes no sense": meaning, there must be something more to punk rock. The song makes a vague call "to unite," as did many of the letters in zines, but there was nothing explicitly to unite over other than the music and the scene. The music itself for hardcore punks was not a strong enough focus -- as punk was supposed to be about something more than music -- and the "scene" was defined by, more than anything, its violence. So the song can come up with no solutions, no paths out of the contradiction. Finally, by chanting "GOTTA RIP IT UP" over and over throughout the song, the Adolescents leave every possibility that the anti-violence message of the song could be lost altogether on the audience. The "wrecking crew" and clockwork orange-style violence highlight the limits of the hardcore punk vision.

The anarchy proposed by punks was almost universally explicitly non-political, and violence was as much aimed internally as externally. One punk tells the story of watching two rival groups of punks fighting at a show and as the police charge through to break it up, uniting to fight the police, and then, as the end of the police wedge passed through toward the stage, recombining behind the police to fight each other again.[60] Punk violence was just as often directed within as without. The most common self-mutilation of punks, other than substance abuse, was called "carving," that is, slicing one's body with a razor blade. The cutting was a type of writing on the body and a rejection of the dominant Southern California beautiful body ideal; it claimed the body as one's own space, removing it from the realm of commodification. It also restated the body as the site of abuse, accepting and emphasizing a different aspect of dominant ideological constructions. Black Flag lead singer Henry Rollins related in his diary,

> 9.22.84 Guernville CA: ... Gig went well. A lot of people showed up. I found a small room to hang out in before the show. I found a piece of broken glass and started slamming it into my chest. Blood started flying all over the place. It felt good to feel pure pain. Helped me get perspective.[61]

Incredibly, Rollins performed this action sober and presumably in control, not high on drugs or alcohol, and this was just one of many instances he describes in his diary. While there was a tradition of self-mutilation in rock'n'roll, especially in punk rock, the act was always performed as theater, even as a ritualized sacrifice, but for Rollins self-cutting was about life, not performance. To Rollins, the self-mutilation was less about "punk performance" than about identity -- or at least, his punk performance took place not only on the stage, but in every aspect of everyday life. He goes on to recount that "The owner of the club came and saw me and bailed fast. He must have thought I was crazy. Like I give a fuck about what he thinks." But Rollins does care. The owner is essential to the story as proof that Rollins is different from others, that he could reach something "pure, direct and simple to understand."[62] Carving was a part of everyday life, and it was one way Rollins established his identity as a "real" person in a hyperreal, postmodern world.

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[60] Interview with Tony Reflex, May 10, 1997.

[61] Henry Rollins, *Get in the Van: On the Road With Black Flag*, (Los Angeles: 2.13.61 Press, 1994), 110-111.

Hardcore punk was in one way a pursuit of "reality." Bands such as Black Flag and the Minutemen, for example, valorized touring above all else as it signified hard work and a rejection of consumerism. Recordings were made as a way to get people to come to shows, reversing the priority of the normal rock business where touring was undertaken simply to promote the recorded product. Rollins' published tour diary from his years as the band's lead singer in the early eighties contains barely a mention of punk rock ideology or social criticism. The 250 pages are filled with often numbingly mundane details of driving, driving, driving, hours trying to sleep packed in the back of the van between speaker cabinets. Rollins chronicles the sound checks, the interviews, the meals, the sleeping on people's floors, the fighting -- between band members, audience members, and between band and audience -- and the shows, the rock'n'roll which kept it all going. Rock'n'roll stood for hardness, and hardcore meant reality -- it was the hardness of touring which separated Black Flag from the rest of society -- and from most (to him, inauthentic) punks:

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[62] Also interview with Tony Reflex, October 3, 1995.

> Black Flag was on a work ethic that I had never experienced and have never seen since. Greg, Chuck and their nonstop roadie Mugger were the hardest working people I had ever seen. If you ever made a noise about anything, Mugger would just start laughing and say something like, "This isn't Van Halen! Get it happening!"... I learned what hard work was with Black Flag.[63]

Black Flag's adoption of the punk animosity toward hippies reflected not so much disgust with the music business, as earlier punks' had, but instead a disgust with the consumerist ethos, an ethos which led people to accept their fate.[64] Black Flag rejected the foundational distinction between work and leisure in postmodern consumer society. To them, touring represented the refusal to accept the safe suburban home, an inscription ("creepy crawling" they called it) on the American landscape with the objective to leave their mark and move on, not conquer markets or the masses.[65]

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[63] Rollins, 11, 14.

[64] Interview in *Decline of Western Civilization* and Tim Tonooka, "Black Flag [interview], *Ripper* [San Jose] No. 3 (ca. 1980), 12-18.

Black Flag's entry into everyday life both rejected and replicated parts of the dominant value system of postsuburbia. Postsuburban punk in general retained barely any of the explicitly political content of earlier London and Hollywood punk. The politics of hardcore punk was an anti-politics, at most a "personal politics" -- at least that was all most punks would admit to. Bass player Chuck Dukowski defined the anarchic politics of their music: "My definition of it is, a commitment to change, no system. Cuz the world really is anarchy. But a person committed to it is committed to destruction of the status quo."[66] But beyond that there was no specified agenda. Black Flag described their songs, like so many of the postsuburban punk bands did, as personal, not directly political: "They deal with everyday things that may happen to you."[67] And what politics the songs had came out of the musical structure, more even than the lyrics, according to Greg Ginn, guitarist and chief songwriter: "[A]lot of our politics is *in* our sound, but not just on the surface.... There is no one solution, musically, politically or ideologically.... A preachy political song can have *less* impact than your actions."[68]

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[65] See Mike Watt in *Musician*, No. 199 (June 1995), 30, 49-50; and, interview with Black Flag in *Ripper*.

[66] *Ripper* No. 3, (ca. 1980), 16.

[67] Dez Cadena in *Ripper* No. 3, 16.

Black Flag's stance on punk violence reflected their apolitical politics, their "refusal" and their staunch individualism. The band emerged from a local scene in Hermosa Beach at "the Church" -- a greying, decaying old church converted to living and playing space. Band founder Greg Ginn was producing electronic components for a living when he decided to try to put a band together after hearing the Ramones in 1976.[69] As one of the first -- and hardest working -- of the postsuburban bands, Black Flag was positioned, because of its musical experience and its already established routine of self-produced recordings and performances, as the standard bearer of the beach punk phenomenon. They quickly became the most popular band among the new crowd of punks. They were banned from every club in the area because of the often legitimate fear of violence at their shows. They were harassed by police and forced out of several living and office sites.

The debate over punk violence raged both within the subculture and between hardcore punks and the institutions of the dominant culture. The question being debated in one mainstream rock newspaper, "Whose Responsibility?," was prompted specifically by Black Flag's refusal to speak out, either from the stage or in the press, against the violence at their concerts. Punks and their defenders came up with a range of responses to what they considered unfair treatment in the press. The owner of one punk club argued that bands and promoters should join together to keep the violent element out. A punk from Hermosa Beach blamed the rock press for noticing Black Flag only when there was violence involved. Another defended Black Flag's position as artists and claimed the violence was not being perpetrated by "real" punks: "Black Flag shouldn't have to discourage their crowd from violence. They are *musicians* not policemen. The majority of what you call Huntington Beach surf-punks are actually ... people who don't know or respect what the scene is really about."[70] But, the Huntington Beach punks *were* violent, proudly and unabashedly so, from the very beginning of their scene.

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[68] Quoted in *BAM* #162, (August 12, 1983), 30.
[69] See Spot, liner notes to *Everything Went Black*.

Black Flag's silence on the issue of violence signalled not simply an acceptance of the violence, but a specific political stance that reflected their social environment and time-period. Band members could claim that they hated authority and therefore refused to assume it. They used the black flag as a symbol of anarchy to seemingly free themselves from the leadership position of the rock star. But their music and performance, as the instigator and centerpiece of the gathering of punks, was designed to make something happen. Anti-police songs like "Revenge" and "Police Story" and lyrics like "I've got no values/nothing to say/I've got no values/might as well blow you away" seemed to confirm their violent image.

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[70] *BAM* #99, (March 13, 1981), 14-16.

Black Flag neither condemned the violence surrounding them, nor articulated a defense of their own position. But the band did not defend their audience either. In fact, the band, by the time Rollins joined as the fourth and final lead singer in mid-1981, aimed its assault as much at its own audience as at the world outside. The building of the punk scene through touring did not mean the creation of the beloved community. Rollins, in particular, was concerned to separate himself from the punk rock "posers" in the audience. Of course, in this he was little different than so many of the punks who debated the conformity of the scene. In fact, the contestation, fragmentation, and violence within the scene provides the key to understanding this specific subculture, and more generally, the position of youth in 1970s postsuburban society.

Postsuburban punk rockers refused a unitary position, rejecting universals and even strategic thinking, in reflection of their position in a postmodern, postsuburban world. Declining to speak against punk violence, Black Flag refused to set themselves up as a central institution, as leaders of a movement. Unlike the previous generation's leaders, and even unlike punks in other locales, they would not attempt to centralize in pursuit of either power or ideals. In Northern California's Bay Area, by contrast, a small group of punks established bands, zines, and record labels with the explicit purpose of providing the central institutions for what they hoped would be an international youth movement. In postsuburban Southern California punks preferred to fight over the meaning, fashion and sound of punk rather than attempt a politics modelled on an ideal of "youth culture."

The youth of the sixties saw themselves as peaceful; either as passive consumers of the Pepsi Generation, or as agents of social change modeling themselves on the nonviolent direct action of the civil rights movement, or as hippies embracing peace and love. When violence broke out it was thought to come from the authorities: the military in Vietnam, redneck sheriffs in the south, or the police in cities across America. When the Chicago police smashed the heads of demonstrators in 1968, young people chanted, "The whole world is watching," assuming their peaceful demeanor brought them sanction in the eyes of the public. Youth identity and community were maintained with a peaceful vision, often defined explicitly in opposition to a violent "mainstream." Youth violence was not new, with the most obvious model being the juvenile delinquents of the fifties. But in Southern California of the 1970s/80s, violence was once again presented to youth as an option, as one possibility for defining identity and community. In the balkanized world of Southern California residential policy, many models for violence were presented to young people. Most obviously, the reinvigorated war machine of the Reagan assault on the evil empire, centered in the military-industrial complexes of the region, gave young people an image of violence to reject, if they wished. More important to how hardcore punk rockers constructed their images of violence and politics was the general tenor of politics in the region, defined by the homeowners' tax revolts, anti-busing movements, and residential slow growth movements. None of these movements was necessarily violent, but all emphasized defensiveness and the sanctity of borders: the politics of exclusion. The politics of hardcore punk reflected the local political tactics in Southern California. After the Elks Lodge riot, violence was attractive to the new breed of punk, giving justification. Like the Black Power movement after 1965, or fragments of the New Left after 1968, the violence of the authorities against a subculture or social movement seemed to justify a violent response. With hardcore punk rock, however, violence was not targeted simply at the "establishment" or authority figures, but was endemic to the "scene" and to the creation of that scene.

Conclusion: "The World's A Mess, It's In My Kiss": Growing Up Punk

In recent issues of *Flipside* -- still publishing after twenty years -- a debate played out in print between two of the zines founders. In issue #108 Pooch -- one of the original "editors" and current poetry editor -- wrote "An Open Letter to My Friend Al" regarding the relative historical standing of the L.A. punk scene vis-a-vis those from New York and London. Pooch praised the output of the L.A. bands, but even more highlighted the continued contributions of old L.A. punks in the world of show business. Pooch emphasized, in particular, those musicians and producers who had gone on to mainstream success and stability. Pooch was right. Many ex- or continuing-punks from Los Angeles are involved in movies, music and publishing in the entertainment capital of the world. Several have gone on to near-stardom. Original Hollywood punk bands are constantly reforming and playing local clubs and touring nationally. Pooch concluded, "So you see, Al, LA's not only survived, but prospered since we started *Flipside* twenty years ago (yikes!)."[1]

In the following issue of *Flipside*, Al -- the editor and the only one of the five founders to continue at the zine since its inception -- replied that Pooch's argument seemed to provide, in fact,

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[1] Pooch, "An Open Letter to My Friend Al," *Flipside* #108 (September/October 1997), n.p. (on third page).

> evidence that the L.A. punk scene had never really accomplished anything -- with classic examples of sell-outs and people and bands who abandoned working to create an alternative for the security and wealth the major labels had to offer.

Al was right. But then Al realized that "[W]e were not talking about the same thing!" For Al, punk had always meant

> being part of a whole new 'alternative' network... the beginning of a whole NEW network of bands and fanzines and record labels with their own means of production, distribution and promotion that was independent of the tired and exploitative, non-supportive system already in place (the major labels, publications, etc.)

Since that network continued to exist, but had, in Al's opinion, made no major impact on the mainstream music business, he argued that punk -- from L.A., New York, London, or anywhere -- was a failure. In fact, Al acknowledged that "a whole new music-centered network was a nice idea, in theory, but I don't think that was ever really the intention of too many people." He concluded "that most people would casually take up some middle position."

The debate demonstrates one thing: that the contestation over punk continues twenty years on. As Al sniped at Pooch:

> I would be hard pressed to find anyone but you who would use most of the names on your list and "punk" in the same sentence.... Are we from the same planet? These people may have been a part of the punk scene on your planet but not on mine. Exploitation is all I can think of that they could

have possibly contributed to punk rock.[2]

A better question is not what has become of punk, but what has become of the punks? The issue is not simply about who has the proper definition of punk. More important is what Pooch and Al have in common, and how they both reflect the social dimension of emerging from the punk scenes of the late-1970s/early-1980s. In part it is a matter of taste. Pooch has always liked the poppier music, and Al the harder stuff. But Pooch and Al were both, and are still both, trying to carve out a space for themselves to exist within the world, without being too burdened by it, without being overwhelmed by it. Now approaching forty, with hairlines receding, they both embraced punk originally as a filter for looking at the world around them, and both have remained true to their original conception of punk.

First of all, punk is music, a subcultural sound which only a minority can appreciate. But punk also allows them to be in but not of the world. For Pooch this means he can work a boring nine-to-five office job because after hours he still has his music, his poetry, his zine, his scene. And he can be the only one on the *Flipside* staff who will deal with the major labels when they come a-calling, looking for the next big thing; but for Pooch, being a representative of *Flipside* -- a punk -- allows him to say no to the bigshots when they try to ply him with free gifts or wheedle a cover story for their artist. For Al, being a punk means working full-time on *Flipside*, finding ways to expand to reach a larger and larger audience (as the zine now distributes over 10,000 copies per issue), while still trying to create an independent network outside of the major corporate distributors. Both Pooch and Al continue to live and work in the same San Gabriel Valley area in which they grew up, as do so many of the punks of fifteen-twenty years ago in postsuburban Southern California.[3]

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[2] Al Flipside, "Dog Gone Pooch," *Flipside* 109 (November/December 1997), n.p. (on second and third pages).

Another example: Tony from the Adolescents. Tony continues to gig regularly, and with abandon, as the singer of a constantly changing line-up in the ADZ (they're not adolescents anymore, after all). "Kids of the Black Hole" and the first Adolescents' album are regarded as classics in punk circles, and Tony has had the possibility to "sell out," to possibly make a living as a rock'n'roller, if not a rock star. But, in response, Tony has changed his name at least three times in his life, refusing to let even the independent labels that distribute his records capitalize on his fame by referring to his past. Currently Tony Reflex, he also has a life outside of punk rock. Married, and the father of a young child, Tony recently received his master's degree in special education and will not schedule a gig if it means missing work and letting down his students.[4]

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[3] Interview with Pooch, January 13, 1995; interview with Al Flipside, October 3, 1995.

All three of these long-time punks (if they would continue to call themselves that) share a certain outlook on the world, an outlook shaped by their experiences as punks in postsuburban Southern California. They are all intent on carving out their own niche in the world, without buying into, or trying to change, the bigger picture. All have "grown-up," but without grand ideals to be achieved or dashed. Their politics is still an anti-politics, at most a personal politics. As it did twenty years ago, their outlook fits well -- in allowing both them and the status quo to survive -- in contemporary society.

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[4] Interviews with Tony Reflex, July 12, 1995; October 3, 1995; May 10, 1997.

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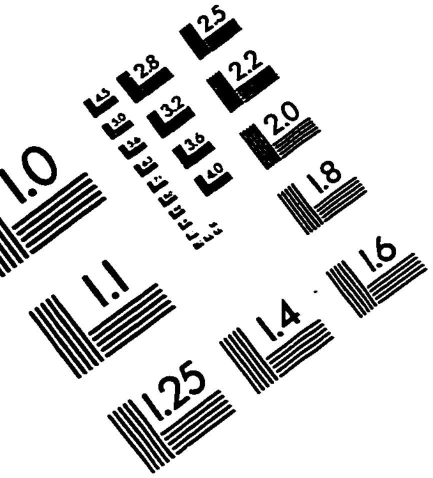
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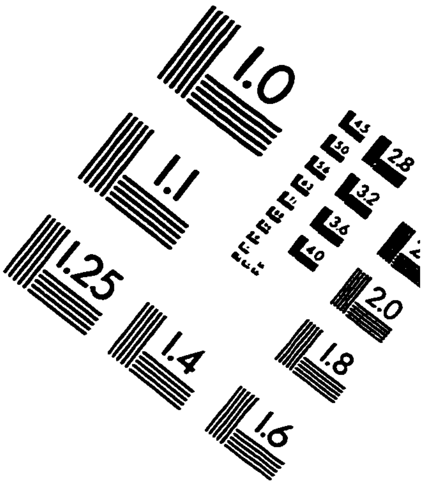
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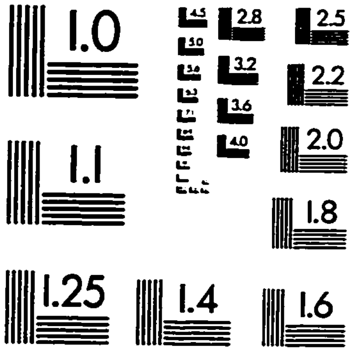
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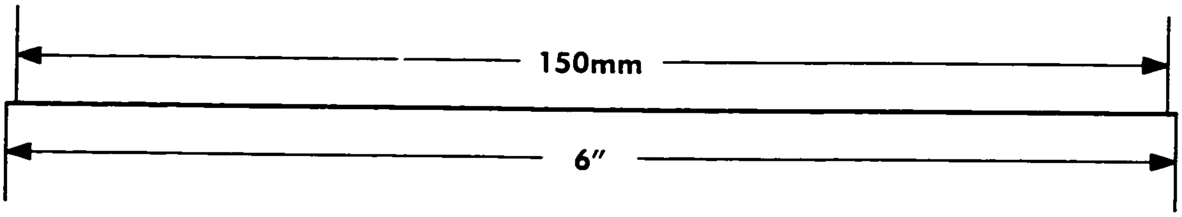

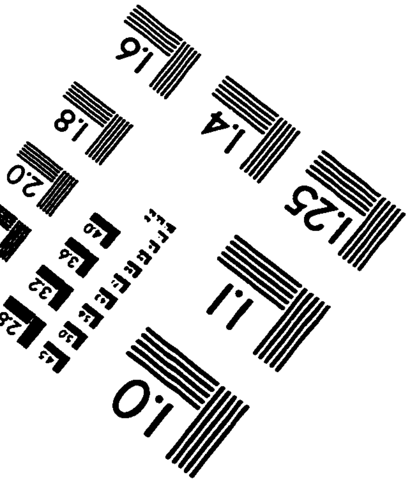
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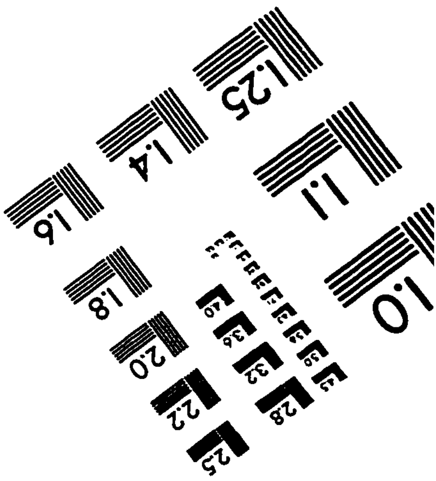
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